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ABSTRACT

This document responds to issues raised in a Schools Council discussion paper analyzing the first years of schooling in Australia. The document is divided into nine chapters covering the following topics: (1) the national and historical context in which early childhood programs currently operate; (2) conditions that foster teachers' ability to work effectively with 5- to 8-year-old children in the schools, such as knowledge of children's characteristics, the use of developmentally appropriate practices, and appropriate staffing levels and class sizes; (3) school entry and transition issues; (4) parents and the community; (5) the accountability of school programs and school- based evaluation; (6) the role of schools in the context of social issues; (7) appropriate preparation for teachers working with 5- to 8-year-old children in schools; (8) methods of inducting teachers into the workplace, inservice training, and wider concerns of the child care industry; and (9) implications of the issues raised in this paper for education systems. A reference list of more than 130 items, a glossary of early childhood terms, and a brief description of early childhood systems in each Australian state are included. (MM)

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AECA WORKING PAPER

EARLY CHILDHOOD IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS: FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A Discussion Paper Commissioned by

The Schools Council

Prepared for AECA by Jean Gifford

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This paper formed the basis for the commissioned paper, A Stitch in Time: Strengthening the First Years of School, to be published by the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training. It was written following national circulation of a draft discussion paper, and incorporates responses to the draft paper. A Stitch in Time is an abridged version of this paper, with some minor modifications.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Becoming a 'clever/competent' country means starting early. The new concern to develop a highly skilled workforce has placed education in centre stage. Most of the national attention on is being focused on postcompulsory schooling and industry-based training. Yet the key competencies sought by industry and government develop from foundations laid down in early childhood.

Early childhood expertise needs to be recognised. A climate of 'managerialism' has militated against the use of professional input in the administration of education and the development of education policy. In early childhood, the trend to replace professionals with generalist managers has been compounded by a loss of recognition of early childhood as a specialist area. Few decision makers remain with any knowledge of, or interest in, early childhood.

Working effectively with children 5 - 8 in schools calls for special techniques and specialist training. Developmentally appropriate practice for this age group requires child-centred, flexible teaching with a strong emphasis on play and guided learning, and use of an integrated curriculum. Class sizes need to be smaller than they typically are now. Use of vertical grouping could encourage greater flexibility within classrooms. The physical layout of classrooms and other spaces used by children need to be considered with the special requirements of children 5 - 8 in mind.

Transition between a range of other early childhood programs and school will be most effective when there are strong professional links between all the programs within the early childhood field. In the meantime, schools need to be proactive in developing these links.

Parents are vital partners within the first years of school. Their role as partners needs to be taken seriously, and creative ways of permitting working parents to become active within the school program need to be developed. The reality of two parent working families, single parent families and blended families needs to be accepted and respected.

Schools are crucial to the integrity of neighbourhoods and communities.
The benefits of strong links between school and neighbourhood flow both ways.

Communities have the right to expect schools to be accountable. Outcome measures can be useful tools, but must not be allowed to distort the education process in negative, unproductive ways.

Schools must get their own house in order before attempting to solve other problems. Many can see important potential connections between schools and parent education programs, early intervention programs and child care provision.

While there is clearly the need for better integration of services for families with children, including schools, not everyone would agreed that education systems are the only or best institutions to run these programs. It seems sensible for schools to focus first on their own classrooms, re-establish good teaching practice based on early childhood principles in the first three years of school, and consciously work to develop better working relationships with other agencies.

Appropriate teacher education requires specialisation in early childhood. Care must be taken to ensure that early childhood teacher education courses do not become diluted through integration with other teacher education courses. Courses must maintain a balance of liberal studies, foundation and practical components. Adequate levels of supervised field practice in early childhood settings are essential. Courses must be taught by experienced, early childhood teacher educators, including the supervision of field practice. A narrower specialisation within the 0 - 8 age range is recommended.

Early childhood teachers need better induction. This is especially true for early childhood teachers working outside school settings. The move to reform school induction procedures may result in models which will need adaptation in non-school settings.

Continuing professional development through in-service education and advisory support for early childhood teachers is essential. In-service courses should be accredited. Those offering inservice training and advisory personnel need to have specialised expertise in early childhood programs.

Industrial arrangements need to recognise the wholeness of the early childhood field before genuine integration can occur between the full range of early childhood services. Award coverage of early childhood programs is chaotic, and though moving towards rationalisation, there is still an inequitable distinction between care and education in terms of recognised status, pay and working conditions.

Competency standards for child care, preschool and school teachers could eliminate the care/education dichotomy. On the other hand, if the standards are introduced for child care alone, and if TAFE training but not university teacher education courses is linked to industry standards, the gulf may be widened. To be effective, competency standards for the early years in schools must be developed by teachers with on the ground knowledge of teaching this age group, with input from parents.

A policy of employing early childhood trained teachers for K, Yr 1 and Yr 1 classrooms needs to be re-instated. Early childhood needs to be identified as a specialist area in schools, and data needs to be collected about the characteristics of early childhood classrooms and teachers. To do this, an agreed system of early

childhood nomenclature needs to be adopted.

Recommendations:

1. The Commonwealth Schools Commission ideal class size standard of 15 children for Kindergarten classes and 20 children for Years 1 - 2 should be adopted by schools, or;

   Alternatively, the recommended class size standard could be viewed as an adult:child ratio of 1:15. As in preschool programs, staff making up this ratio could consist of one trained teacher and one full-time assistant.

   In either case, the effective ratio should be reduced to 1:15 in Kindergarten classes and 1:20 in Years 1 - 2 as quickly as possible. While working to achieve this ratio, classes with ratios lower than this should immediately be provided with the help of part-time teacher aides, with the most time being allocated to the youngest classes.

2. Entry policies should be matched with structure and style of classroom teaching to minimise the difficulties caused by the particular policy adopted. Once again, though, a more open structure within the 5 - 8 age group minimises the problems caused by unequal amounts of time spent by children in the first year of school due to birth date. Systems should also bear in mind that decisions they make with regard to enrolment procedures have large impacts on early childhood programs feeding into primary schools.

   For the sake of those families who move interstate while children rare in school, there seem to be good arguments for introducing uniformity between States in the ages children start school and the structure of the education system generally. A standard 13 years of education beginning with kindergarten for 5 year olds,

   being the most common pattern, should be adopted by all States and Territories.

3. Schools should consider the needs of children in early childhood classes when allocating available space with the school. Wherever possible children in K-2 should be provided with easy access to the playground, toilets and sufficient classroom space to permit the creation of permanent space for varied play as well as table and storage space.

4. Schools should aim to ensure that early childhood classes are taught by teachers qualified in early childhood studies.

5. The direct linking of schooling and care is less desirable for the time being than a conscious commitment within schools to support child care programs wherever possible.

6. In-service courses should be accredited, and, wherever possible, should give teachers advanced standing in recognised advanced studies.

7. Teachers also need on-going personal advisory support if they are to work optimally, especially if they are trying to use developmentally appropriate practice within a more traditional, subject-oriented primary school. Advisory personnel need to have specialised expertise in early childhood programs.

8. Any move to introduce competency standards into schools should be subject to open processes of scrutiny and debate. If competency standards are to be developed for early childhood teachers in schools, practicing classroom teachers and parents should participate in their development, and efforts should be made to link the competencies identified with those to be developed for the rest of the early childhood field.

9. Education departments need to re-instate the special identity of early childhood classes and begin to document their characteristics.

10. An agreed system of early childhood nomenclature needs to be adopted.

Preface

Early childhood programs are known by many different names across Australia. More confusing still, many of the same terms in common use refer to different programs in different States. A glossary of early childhood terms as they are used in different States/Territories is attached at the end of the paper.

For simplicity's sake, and in the hope of encouraging a national approach to the use of terminology in the early childhood field, this paper uses the term 'preschool' to refer to programs (usually sessional) offered to children in the 12 months before they commence school. The non-compulsory first year of school is referred to as 'kindergarten' or (K). The two remaining early childhood years of school are called Year 1 and Year 2.

The terms 'children's services' and 'early childhood programs' are used in this paper as synomymous, generic terms which encompass the full range of programs found in services for children 0 - 8 in Australia.

The complexities of coming to grips with the early childhood field in Australia are not limited to terminology. The spread of early childhood programs, their reach and degree of interrelatedness vary greatly from one State to another. Often early childhood programs have developed haphazardly and in belated recognition of need, rather than by conscious design, and thus reflect State's different histories. Writing a paper from a national perspective inevitably means that some local detail will be wrong, but readers should be able to translate the general message about national trends to the particulars of their own place.

At the very end of the paper a thumbnail sketch of the structure of each State and Territory's early childhood services is provided to give readers a sense of this diversity.

INTRODUCTION

The 1990s promise to be a decade of great significance for Australian schools. Restructuring of the workforce, as part of micro-economic reform, has placed education in centre stage in a new way. The necessity of developing a 'clever' as well as a technically skilled workforce requires education and training of the general population to levels never before attempted in this country . The new vision for the Australian workforce is of one that is capable of working independently of supervision, of engaging in decision-making and the minute-by-minute discretionary exercise of broadly based skills with a commitment to shared goals and accountability for outcomes, able to participate in further training and able to move through a structured career path (Carmichael, 1991).

Most of the attention nationally has been focussed on secondary and post secondary education and vocational training. There is renewed interest in industry-based training programs of all kinds and in programs aimed at developing better links between secondary schooling and the transition to the work place. Particular emphasis is being placed on the acquisition of basic, entry level work skills (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991). This focus is scarcely surprising, as it is at the point of entry into the workforce that deficiencies in skills among workers are first noticeable.

Centrally important among the work skills to be strengthened are basic literacy, numeracy, problem solving ability, self confidence, self respect and commitment to the workplace. These are skills and attitudes which need to be established long before the worker arrives at the factory or even the high school. They are basic to all successful formal learning and their foundations are laid very early in children's lives as a consequence of their interactions with the world around them, first within their families (White, 1975, Topping, 1986) and later in social groups outside the home. These foundations are strengthened through participation in high quality early childhood programs (Plowden, 1967, Carrick, 1989, Weikart, 1989) and consolidated in the first years of primary schooling when oral language and functional mathematical skills are given symbolic expression and are further elaborated.

While it is never too late to offer anyone educational opportunities, it would be short sighted in the extreme to neglect these crucial early years in an attempt to rectify deficiencies at the top end of the education system. The Schools Council has recognised the importance of directing national attention to the crucial beginning years of education in its current project, The Compulsory Years of Schooling. Stage 1 of the project commenced with the issuing of a discussion paper in February 1991 on the early years of schooling (K to year 5).

The present paper is one of several commissioned responses to that paper. It is an elaboration of the issues raised in the February Schools Council discussion paper as they affect the early childhood end of these first years of schooling. This paper also

examines the way these issues interact with the rest of the early childhood field. Early childhood, by agreed international definition (Organisation Mondiale Pour L'Education Prescolaire, 1948, NAEYC, 1982, Ebbeck, 1991), and as it is understood within Australia (AECA, 1986, Ashby, 1991, FOSCO, 1991) comprises the period from birth to eight. In most Australian school systems, this definition encompasses the first three years of primary schooling.

The early childhood field has adopted the 0 - 8 definition of early childhood in order to encourage high quality, coherent provision for children in these important formative years. When social systems 'carve up' childhood and provide different services by separated institutions, discontinuities inevitably develop.

Responses to a preliminary draft of this paper from practioners within the early childhood field reflected frustration with an uncritical acceptance of the status quo in which the gulf between schooling and the rest of early childhood services is frequently very wide. While still acknowledging the present realities of schooling and the restricted domain of the Schools Council, this paper now attempts to give the issue of integrated early childhood services more attention.

The paper touches on a wide range of issues, all of which are dealt with in more depth in other places, but which seem not to have been brought together in this way before. It is hoped that the paper will serve as the stimulus for much further discussion and debate.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEXT

The national context

Coupled with new expectations of the education system are pressures for much greater efficiency and accountability of school systems--to government, the community at large and to parents. There has been a major policy shift from interest in achieving educational improvements through added resources (especially financial) to a focus on outcomes, leading to advocacy for staff appraisal measures and performance indicators such as the identification of attainment levels for children (Walker, 1990). At the same time there has been a significant move to centralise and standardise the curriculum (Boomer, 1990). The resulting push for documented outcomes in standardised ways has particular implications for the quality of educational experience available to very young children, as will be discussed in more detail later. At the same time as curriculum decisions are centralising, administration and management, especially day to day financial management, is devolving onto schools. Central administration and support structures are being systematically dismantled.

A policy of integrating children with disabilities has meant that increased skill levels are required of classroom teachers, but the the necessary additional resources are often not provided (Westwood, 1991). In addition, schools are being asked to address a host of social problems such as child abuse, gender inequality, racism, peace and environmental education, and much more, leading to heavy pressures to crowd the curriculum.

Schools are also experiencing the impact of the enormous social change that has occurred within Australian society in the last half of this century (Ochiltree, 1984, 1990), leading to more diversity within classrooms than is yet adequately acknowledged or managed. Family structures and work patterns are changing. Single parent and blended families are much more common than in the past. Schools can find themselves dealing with families with several sets of surnames, and children who have no mum or dad, or, increasingly, who have more than one 'mum' or 'dad'. The dramatic increase in the workforce participation of married women over the last ten to twenty years poses challenges to the traditional organisation of a large number of institutions, not the least of them being schools wishing to encourage closer participation of parents in their children's schooling.

Changes to the ethnic make-up of Australian society have major implications for the organisation and delivery of a whole range of services if they are to be appropriate and accessible to all Australian citizens and residents. This adaptation of Australian institutions has barely begun, and schools have a central role to play.

There are also structural changes within Australia that mirror those occurring in schools. These changes are evident throughout industry and government, and reflect global trends towards economic rationalism, managerialism, and instrumentalism.

The new dominance of 'managers' as opposed to 'administrators' is resulting in an erosion of the purchase that those with professional knowledge have over the conditions affecting their work. In analysing this shift both Yeatman (1991) and Walker (1990) call, though in different ways, for professionals to take note of their changed circumstance and regroup for a counter-attack.

Professionals are being dealt a double blow. The new administrative style gives less weight to professional expertise than formerly and places much importance on corporate goal setting and the management of systems on the basis of monitoring performance against criteria which are not necessarily linked to professional goals. Alongside the shift to managing rather than supporting professionals is a concurrent shift in responsibility for policy making from professionals to the industrial arena; the Industrial Relations Commission, parties to industrial awards and often narrowly based tri-partite working parties and consultative committees. Professional interests feel locked out of decision-making arenas from both causes. The latter set of changes disadvantages all educational groups whose interests are not fully addressed by teaching unions, including parents and interested members of the community.

The National Board of Employment, Education, and Training, in its report to the Australian Education Council, The Shape of Teacher Education: Some Proposals, urged the teaching profession to establish a 'national professional body representative of the profession as a whole, with its main concerns being quality of training, standards of professional conduct, professional development and the recognition and registration of qualifications' (NBEET, 1990:12), though this suggestion has so far met with a fairly cool reception from the field.

The meaning of the present context for early childhood programs in schools

Perhaps the major difficulty for early childhood programs in the present climate of change is their almost total lack of a power base within schools, education authorities, teacher training institutions, or within the Commonwealth government. It is perhaps partly because of this absence of power that early childhood programs in schools are invisible in the large number of official reports of schools over recent years, including Australia's Teachers (Schools Council, 1990). Reports that recommend remedies fail to consider the impact of change on the early childhood sector, or assume that early childhood programs will fit satisfactorily into models developed for primary schools generally, as occurred in the report, Teacher Education in Australia (Working Party on Teacher Education, 1990).

This lack of visibility and absence of a voice in modifying proposals for change, coupled with the ultimate inability of early childhood teachers to control any major aspect of the large number of changes impinging on schools, teaching and teacher preparation, has many serious implications for the continued existence of effective teaching in the early childhood years in primary schools.

The current vulnerability of the early childhood sector has not always been characteristic of the field. It is worth a brief examination of the factors that have led early childhood teachers to their present dilemma.

Historical perspective

Today's early childhood profession is caught in a much more complex web than teachers in any other sector. Early childhood is internationally defined as covering the years of childhood between birth and eight years of age. Most early childhood teacher preparation programs in Australia now encompass this age range (Tayler, 1990), but the existence of early childhood teachers for this broad age group is relatively recent here. The move to early childhood training occurred in the main in the 1970s when State teachers' training colleges, which prepared infants teachers to work with children 5 - 8 in schools, became Colleges of Advanced Education and expanded their courses to include preparation of teachers for preschool. Kindergarten Teacher's Colleges also became CAEs, some eventually amalgamating with the larger colleges, and also offered early childhood courses.

Prior to the change to CAE's there were essentially two distinct groups of teachers. Most of the kindergarten teachers' colleges had concentrated on preparing teachers to work with children 3 - 5 in Kindergarten Union-run kindergartens or community based preschools. Some, such as the Adelaide Kindergarten Teachers' College, offered limited opportunities to study the needs of older children through links with neighbouring Teachers' Colleges and students who elected to take these additional subjects were sometimes employed to teach older children in non-government schools (Dowd, 1983).

In this period both the kindergarten teacher and the infants teacher had substantial control over their work environment. Most primary schools were divided into infants sections and upper primary sections, following the British model. Many larger schools had entirely separate infants schools. Although most Australian States made education compulsory from age 6, many systems offered school entry from age 5. A few schools admitted children from age 3. The typical infants school or department within a primary school catered for children aged between 5 and 8.

Promotions positions in infants sections and schools were the domain of women who had specialised infants training (often an additional year beyond the basic two). While school systems seem to have varied in the extent to which the inspectors of infants teachers had specialised expertise in the teaching of young children, it appears that they often did. In some States at least, infants mistresses commonly established Mothers' Clubs as a means of obtaining parent support and directing additional funds into the first three years of school. A close link between the employing Education Department and teacher training was guaranteed by the fact that the Teachers' Training Colleges were run by the Education Department.

Kindergarten teachers (or preschool teachers as they are now more commonly called nationally) worked in an environment that was virtually immune from outside influence, except for the influx from overseas of new ideas in methods, content or purpose of kindergarten or nursery school programs. Kindergarten teacher educators made regular visits to Europe, Britain and the US. Staff for the KTC's were engaged from Britain and America when there were no suitable Australian candidates. Overseas influences have had a substantial impact on Australian programs throughout most of this century.

The kindergarten system was independent of the school system, and for most of this period existed without government funding or intervention, with the exception of a brief period during World War II. As with infants teachers, there was a very close relationship between the employing body and training institutions, as the kindergarten teachers training colleges were established and run by the employing Kindergarten Unions. The principals of the Kindergarten Teachers' Colleges met together under the auspices of the Australian Association for Pre-school Child Development (AAPCD), later re-named the Australian Preschool Association (APA) and now called the Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA). Program and course standards were established and maintained by this interconnected preschool field through AECA.

In the 1970s and early 1980s most graduates of early childhood education courses worked either in preschools or kindergartens with children 3 - 5 years of age, or in schools with children between the ages of 5 - 8 along with teachers who had been trained as infants teachers under the older system. Since then, however, the burgeoning field of children's services has greatly diversified the range of settings in which early childhood teachers may find employment. This issue will be raised again, in considering appropriate preparation for early childhood personnel, and in examining industrial issues and the complex question of the development and application of competency-based standards for teachers.

An important change, which seems to have occurred in most State systems during the 1970s, was a collapsing of the separate infants promotions lists within primary schools into a single list. Prior to this change, infants teachers were prevented from ever becoming principals of primary schools. In some States, such as Victoria, the lists were also separated by gender. A specific promotions position for teachers (nearly always women) in infants sections of schools disappeared, and the concept of an integrated primary school emerged. The need for reform seems to have been viewed from the perspective of equal employment opportunity for women (Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia, 1971). While the change did open up opportunities for women to become primary principals with attendant extra status and pay, the loss of separate identity for infants sections resulted in significant diminution of the power base once held at the lower end of Australian schools. With this loss went the view that special early childhood expertise is required to teach children younger than eight.

The loss of employer-controlled teacher training institutions, which occurred when Colleges of Advanced Education were created during the 1970s, began the trend towards greater separation of teacher preparation and employment which is now the subject of so much comment (see, for example, Turney & Wright, 1991). Significantly, the names of the programs changed from 'training' to 'education'. The new CAE's were required to submit courses for external accreditation, and representatives of employer and professional bodies were normally invited to be members of the mandated accrediting panels.

The newly created early childhood teacher education programs varied in the extent to which they were administratively separate from or integrated into generalist departments or schools of teacher education. Briggs (1984) documents the loss of autonomy beginning to be felt in the early childhood field in the early 1980's as a consequence of this first change. She wrote:

> When I first surveyed the Australian Diplomas of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) in 1980, it was apparent that although Colleges of Advanced Education were aiming to produce a similar end-product to care for and educate children in the birth to eight age range, they were using markedly different methods, curricula and philosophies.
>
> Almost four years later, when most courses have undergone amalgamation, reorganisation and/or budget cuts, those differences are even more apparent.
>
> In 1980, traditionalists...were convinced that a discrete college programme was essential for the maintenance of early childhood specialisation and a methodology that took account of the needs and developmental stages of the individual child.
>
> Those involved in small courses attached to multi-purpose CAEs were equally convinced that there was a place for diversity in training programmes and that they had a different kind of contribution to make, especially in the state primary school, rural, ethnic and community projects.
>
> In 1984, only three Early Childhood Institutes/Divisions have retained any degree of autonomy over their own courses...All other courses are attached to departments, schools or faculties housing other disciplines and primary education or primary and secondary education.
>
> (Briggs, 1984:5)

Various pressures, including reductions in overall funding and attempts to ensure that trainee teachers were more broadly educated within CAE's, led to a general dilution of the specific early childhood component in many courses. To quote further from Briggs:

> In 1980, 80% of ECE courses ensured that students undertook some studies with students preparing for other professions, particularly in the Liberal/General Studies area. In fifty percent of courses, students undertook the majority of their professional studies with primary teacher trainees. At the end of 1983, there are fears that 'the mix' has been 'carried too far' and that
>
> many Early Childhood courses are becoming indistinguishable from Primary Teacher Training without necessarily offering employment opportunities for that sector.
>
> This integration has occurred because of reductions in funding (and, therefore, staffing) and the fact that course and staffing decisions tend to be in the hands of professors, Deans and sometimes Heads of Departments who are not early childhood educationalists and do not always appreciate the differences between early childhood and primary education or the differences in employment expectations.
>
> (Briggs, 1984:8)

A second, more recent, major change has been the amalgamation of Colleges of Advanced Education into the Unified National System of Universities, which has exacerbated the problems of control already evident in 1984 in those programs that were attempting to exist alongside mainstream primary courses. University courses need not be accredited by anyone. At the same time as the field is experiencing an accelerating concern about the appropriateness of early childhood teacher education courses, formal mechanisms for addressing these concerns have been removed. It should be said, however, that universities may elect to invite outsiders to comment on course offerings, and many do.

There are three interrelated additional factors that have to be considered in order to understand the dilemma of early childhood teachers today. All have to do with status; the status assigned to women, to children, and to those teachers associated with young children. In the academic world, most status accrues to those who work with the oldest students, starting with universities and finishing with the toddler section of child care centres, in a remarkably consistent step-wise fashion (with perhaps a dip at post-secondary level because the vocational training concerned lacks the direct links to higher education, which years 11 and 12 have). The academic pecking order has much to do with the place of the child in an adult-oriented society; it also reflects a notion that 'teaching' is to do with imparting knowledge, and that the more complex that knowledge is, the more skilled and deserving of respect the teacher.

The importance of this bias cannot be overemphasised in understanding how it is that the accumulated experience and wisdom of over 100 years of working effectively with young children can be so readily overlooked and forgotten by education departments trying to move schools into the 21st Century.

As has already been noted, women in the 1970s put aside 'childish things' and sought to join the male dominated world of upper primary in a bid for equality. No education system in Australia any longer requires teachers of children at the lower end of school to have specialist expertise to work with this age group. Most have lost the last of their early childhood advisory positions, and many no longer have specific provision for early childhood expertise in curriculum development areas.

CHAPTER TWO: WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH CHILDREN 5 - 8 IN SCHOOLS

> At the heart of the educational process lies the child. No advances in policy, no acquisitions of new equipment have their desired effect unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him.

So began the influential report on the English educational system which became known as the Plowden Report, after Bridget Plowden, Chair of the Advisory Council which produced it in 1967 (Department of Education and Science, 1967). The report went on to conclude that individual differences between children at any given age are so great that any class, however similar it may seem, must be treated as a collection of children needing individual and different attention.

Accepting that this is true, it follows that no hard and fast descriptions of the characteristics of children aged 5 - 8 will apply in every case, or that there are sharp distinctions between children in the age range 5 - 8 and those who are younger or older. Nevertheless, there are some generalisations that will help those who are unfamiliar with this age group, or who have once known children of this age but have forgotten what they were like, to understand the different approach to schooling advocated for them by the early childhood profession.

Characteristics of children 5 - 8

Children 5 - 8 are still maturing physically in many areas. More adept than four year olds, the five year old still has much to master in the areas of fine motor development and in the perceptuo-motor areas required for swift reading and neat writing. Mylenization of nerve endings is incomplete, as is functional differentiation between the hemispheres of the brain (Bee, 1985).

Children in this age range have long attention spans when engrossed, but little voluntary control over the filtering of environmental stimulation which they need to 'pay attention' at will for long periods, or to split attention in order to hear their name being called when they are watching cartoons on television, or to notice cars when they are talking with friends while they cross the road.

Conceptually, many children of this age are not able to understand in an adult sense such basic concepts as time, conservation of number, or the necessity of logic. Children of this age can understand connections, but cannot 'abstract' relationships beyond their immediate experience. It is particularly this 'concreteness' of children's thought that dictates an approach to teaching in early childhood that is active, that uses concrete objects, and that capitalises on multi-sensory experiences. Children in this age group will notice it is raining, but not think to put on their rain coats, or feel hot but fail to notice they are still wearing their overcoats. Remembering to collect the

jumper finally removed on the playing field at lunch time is unlikely. Children in this age range still need to be reminded to go to the toilet, blow their noses, wear sun hats outside and come in out of the rain.

Basic motor skills are achieved by age six or seven, but refining them, integrating them and developing complex movement sequences develops slowly through later childhood. Children of this age enjoy and need frequent opportunities to let off steam through large-muscle activity such as running, skipping, climbing and rough and tumble play fighting. Children entering school at five may still have trouble tying shoe laces, doing up difficult buttons, or opening their lunch boxes.

Linguistically, these children are refining their knowledge of grammar, and may still be making mistakes of over-generalising rules such as adding 'ed' to form the past tense of irregular verbs, leading to such sentences as 'We goed there'. Children will not master complex language constructions such as subordinate clauses for several more years, and still have difficulty understanding the passive voice. Many, especially those who started to speak early, are still refining their pronunciation to fully match standard English speech sounds.

Socially, children in this age group are beginning to experiment with rule-governed group behaviour. Friendships are important, but often are more short-lived than will be the case later. The level of sophistication of children's social skills will depend greatly on their opportunity to interact with groups of children prior to entering school. Many children have difficulty gaining social acceptance from the children they would like to play with, and need the intervention of understanding teachers.

Emotionally, children of 5 - 8 are still very young, and need a great deal of nurturing in between educational challenges if they are to get the most out of their school day. They need attention and approval from the teacher as well as freedom to set some of their own goals. They are eager to learn, show strong curiosity and are able to derive intrinsic satisfaction from gaining new skills and practising old ones without the aid of gold stars or smiley stamps. Many opportunities to fall back into comfortable and familiar routines and play activities are required to balance the challenge of difficult or new tasks. Play is still an important and useful vehicle for learning for this age group. They may have a range of fears which prevent them from participating in aspects of the program, such as free play at recess or lunch time. At least some children in this age group are so reluctant to use school toilets that they 'hold on' all day, leading sometimes to quite serious health problems.

A few children still arrive at primary school straight from home. A day in school for these children represents a first and possibly frightening departure into the world outside the family. Most children, however, will already have had some form of experience in settings outside the family. Many States/Territories have policies of universal preschool provision for the twelve months prior to school entry. These programs are not compulsory, but are extensively utilised. Most children will also

have had some experience of child care, if only part time. An increasing number of children come to school with years of out-of-home group care under their belt. The diversity of children's experience prior to school adds considerably to the normal variation in children's competence in this age range. This at times startling variation in children's range of experience before starting school is very recent, much of it having occurred within the last decade.

Children's competence is also culturally shaped to a significant degree, in ways that probably are not yet fully appreciated. Marridy Malin paints a disturbing picture of how some of these competencies can be misread or simply not noticed when teachers are unaware of their own culturally determined expectations of children (Malin, 1990). Harris (1990) describes white Australia's cultural blindnesses to competence in numeracy among tribal aborigines. While both these studies happen to concern the aboriginal culture, it is almost certain that every culture imposes some different constraints on children's development which will lead to misunderstandings in the classroom unless the teacher is especially sensitive to this possibility.

The nature of 'developmentally appropriate practice' in schools

Good practice in schools depends on seeing the world through each child's eyes, registering objectively their interests and existing competencies, and understanding sufficiently the principles of development to know how to help each child learn efficiently, effectively and meaningfully. Good practice does not permit asking children to learn now, with difficulty, something they will manage more easily later. Nor does it include busy work, the teaching of isolated skill development through memorisation and rote, or the use of work sheets.

Early childhood practitioners have long recognised that effective teaching in this age group must be child-centred, informal, and based on a wide variety of active, manipulative activities, which begin with children's existing knowledge and interests and build on these. Over time, specialists in this age group have moved from a tendency towards whole group work (which tended to characterise preschool programs before WW II and infant classes for somewhat longer) to a much freer approach in which children more commonly work individually or in small groups, coming together as a whole group for a portion of the day only.

Most early childhood educators call for an integrated curriculum, and many advocate the use of themes as a device for achieving this integration, especially if the theme has arisen from the children's own interests. All accept the importance of play periods during the day. Purists insist that there are no distinctions that can usefully be made between work and play in the early childhood years, including the first years of school. A few (eg Creaser, 1990) encourage the use of 'pretend' play as the basis for

the curriculum. Almost all would support the call from Clyde to preserve childhood for children in early childhood programs:

> First, we should argue that early childhood programs, whether they are called preschools, kindergartens, early entry classes or whatever, are there to preserve the concept of 'childhood'; let us replace hothouse with greenhouse. In order to achieve this we must emphasise the traditional and unchanging tenet of early childhood programs; that is, the idea of self-learning on the part of the young child.
>
> (Clyde, 1990:13)

New insights into the nature of development and learning suggest that teachers have a critical role to play in guiding children's learning through adult/child interactions. It is argued that simply creating a planned environment rich in learning opportunities is insufficient. Post-Piagetian thinking emphasises that much learning occurs and is understood in a social context (David, 1990, Fleer, in press). This new emphasis on 'leading', if misunderstood, can encourage teachers to slip into inappropriate, formal teaching styles however.

In 1988 a Statement of Principles for the Education of Children in the Early Years of School in Australia and New Zealand was adopted at the First Years of School Conference held in Melbourne. Drafting of the guidelines was begun at the first conference on the First Years of School held in 1984 and revised following widespread consultation in Australia and New Zealand and further consideration at a conference in Sydney in 1986. The Statement, though couched in early childhood terminology, is a nice distillation of the essential principles underlying the education of children in the early years of school and hence an important reference document for those with responsibility for early childhood programs.

In the face of increasing pressure to introduce formal instruction in academic skills into early childhood programs of all kinds in America, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1986 issued a position statement on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age eight (Bredekamp, 1986). This statement effectively translated early childhood tenets from their fuzzy and often incomprehensible expression within the profession (such as the need to teach 'the whole child', a concept which means a great deal to the initiated but almost nothing to anyone else) into easily understood do's and don't's. It has become a best seller.

More recently, NAEYC have felt compelled to put into writing a set of guidelines for appropriate curriculum content and assessment in early childhood programs, addressing not only *how* to teach, but *what* to teach. The resulting guidelines were developed jointly with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). Their statement makes clear the importance of teachers' having educational goals for children. An overemphasis on

children's preferences and interests, without clear objectives, can lead to a curriculum which fails to lead to learning.

> A fine balance must be achieved in planning curriculum for young children. On the one hand, teachers may err by not doing enough planning to stimulate children's learning (the milling around model), but if their activity is dictated by the plans, the teacher may fail to adapt to individual differences and interests (Jones, 1989).
>
> (NAEYC/NAECS/SDE, 1991:24)

Tricia David (1990), writing from the perspective of a national education system in the UK which is characterised by tightening national curricula developed from the 'top down', with attendant assessment of attainment levels, urges the early childhood field there to sharpen up their defence of good practice:

> ...we can see that it is important for early years practitioners to be capable of articulating their views of the preschool curriculum. Generally speaking, they will begin from a consideration of the young child, his or her development, and the context in which he or she is developing. Since the early days of this century, and the women inspectors' report on under-fives in elementary schools (Bathurst, 1905), formal, subject-divided and teacher-directed schooling had been tried and found wanting as provision for the youngest children.
>
> Unfortunately, as Alexander (1988; 1989) points out, the language which has been used most frequently in the past to discuss the early childhood curriculum has amounted to little more than slogans, such as 'play is a child's work' and 'children learn through play'...
>
> Alexander is right--we do need to examine what we mean by the phrases we use. The cosiness of the past will no longer be allowed us, and if we wish to convince those who are making the decision about what should be done in schools we must be capable of arguing clearly and cogently in defence of an early years curriculum which is built on that developed by the early pioneers - a curriculum based on children's interests and experience.
>
> (David, 1990:77-78).

Efforts to translate principles of good practice in early childhood programs must be made in Australia, too, if the field is to retain these principles in the face of mounting pressure to standardise teaching practice across the primary years.

David elaborates in specific ways her concept of a developmental curriculum, stressing the difference between a structured and a laissez-faire play environment. She documents research showing the difference in learning when children experience carefully planned environments, where their play and activities are supported and guided by the early childhood educator, in contrast to free play.

It needs to be acknowleged that this kind of curriculum and teaching reflects individual theories of development, the learning process and the teacher's own cultural biases. McLean (1991) illustrates this clearly in her careful description of teacher intervention in children's social development. An ability to reflect constantly on one's practice and to make explicit the theory underlying practice is at least as important in teaching young children as it is anywhere else in education.

Goodnow offers a number of useful suggestions on ways to make the goals of early childhood education very explicit and concrete. For example, she suggests that within the broader goal of helping children to be effective individuals, there could be the goal of being effective in group situations. 'Children need to acquire ways of telling other people what they need', is suggested as an alternative to the more typical goal of 'developing language skills' (Goodnow, 1989:8). Having this explicit goal might have alerted the teacher, described so painfully by Malin (1990), to the efforts of the aboriginal child in her class to do just this, but in ways which she could not 'read'.

Battersby (1988) and Sparrow (1991) insist that these steps alone will not uncover the true power relationships operating within the classroom and in wider society. Without an analysis of whose interests are being served in the classroom, early childhood teachers risk perpetuating an unjust status quo.

Sparrow questions an unthinking application of a non-directive, play-centred curriculum for all social groups of children. Boomer (1986) takes up a similar point. He cites an article by Isabelle Proctor in which, when writing on curriculum planning in early childhood for Aboriginal children, she suggested that in the case of disadvantaged Aboriginal children, the discovery, play-oriented form of learning is inadequate and disempowering. She argued for a more deliberate and structured approach to teaching these children how to succeed in schools. Boomer says that when dealing with all children from different socio-ethnic backgrounds from the teacher's, in addition to the basic subject matter, teachers need to be aware of their need to teach children 'how to deal with teachers, how to ask and answer questions, how to produce what is valued, and how to seek out demonstrations when they need it' (Boomer, 1986:31), making much the same point as Goodnow. Disturbingly, Boomer reports on research indicating that children from low socio-economic backgrounds may enter school initiating more verbal exchanges with the teacher than other children. By year 3, middle class children have overtaken them. Boomer guesses that these children had somehow learned to feel 'not at home' at school.

Appropriate staffing levels/class sizes

The present discontinuity in teacher:child ratios between preschool programs designed for four year olds, and school programs for five-year-olds reflects much more about the realities of power relationships within education systems than about the educational needs of students. Preschool programs for four-year-olds usually call for two staff (a qualified teacher and an assistant) and one parent helper per group of 25

children, giving an adult:child ratio of 1:8.3. On the other hand, kindergarten classes typically have one teacher per class of 20 - 25. Many children in primary classes, including those in early childhood classes, experience teacher:child ratios of between 1:25 and 1:30, with 10 percent experiencing class sizes of over 30 children and one teacher and a likelihood of an increase in this figure in the light of budget cuts in some States (Australian Teacher's Union, 1991). Nationally, teacher/child ratios do not drop below this figure until children reach senior secondary school (Australian Teachers Union, 1988). Karmel, in considering appropriate class sizes for the education system in South Australia in 1971, noted that

> The case for smaller sizes in the higher forms rests on informed professional opinion rather than on evidence, and is possibly a rationalisation of the fact that higher forms have traditionally been smaller because of low retention in the past. Professional associations, in discussions with the Committee, advocated smaller classes at higher levels on the grounds that correction per pupil was more time-consuming and that discussion played a more significant part in the work of senior classes. However, the opportunities for self-directed work are also greater in senior classes, and might provide a better preparation for tertiary study.
>
> (Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia, 1971:133)

Nevertheless, despite obvious scepticism the Committee recommended class sizes of 30 for primary schools (having already recommended the abolition of infant sections) and the first three years of secondary schools, but maximums of 20-25 pupils for the final two years of secondary school.

Except for practical sessions such as chemistry labs or woodworking, logic would dictate that priority should be given to reducing class sizes in early childhood classes before acceding to the preferences of senior teachers for classes of this size. All teachers prefer smaller classes. The point at issue ought to be, what is educationally necessary?

By 1984 the Commonwealth Schools Commission recognised that current practices in junior primary classes needed to be changed. In their report, Commonwealth Standards for Australian Schools, they said the following:

> It seems that the most pressing need to reduce class sizes, and the most effective level at which to do so, is in the junior primary grades. Here, young children are making the transition from intimate family environments and small pre-school classes to the more populous and socially challenging primary school situation. In the junior primary years they are learning basic reading and computational skills and concepts, and are acquiring attitudes to further learning as well as confidence in their own capacities to engage in these activities. Their experiences of all of these activities are citical to their future

> success at school and it has therefore been argued that outlaying additional resources on these students in the form of more individualised learning programs in smaller settings will produce lasting educational benefits.
>
> (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1984:81)

The individual approach needed in the early years of school requires classes smaller than 30 or the presence of more than one adult. Cleave, Jowett and Bate (1982) document the shift towards inappropriate practice evident between preschool programs of various kinds and infant classes in Britain. They wrote:

> Perhaps the most striking difference between preschools and infant classes in general is the amount of 'dead' or non-task time. Infants did at least three times as much waiting, queuing and lining-up as preschoolers. Together with cruising and other non-specific behaviour this amounted to more than 17 per cent of all infant activity. This marked increase in dead time is largely a consequence of organisational procedures.
>
> (Cleave, Jowett & Bate, 1982:64)

Among the organisational features identified were the much lower teacher/child ratios found in infant classes. Another feature of the British infant classroom noted by Cleave et al. was the loss of choice over how time was spent. Whereas free choice prevailed in pre-schools, children in infant classes spent over 80 percent of their time in either no-choice or limited-choice situations.

Campbell has asserted that, in addition to these factors, overcrowding itself influences children's ability to work constructively and stay on task. When children are forced to work in too large a group they begin to display increasing amounts of withdrawn or aggressive behaviour as a consequence of reduced personal space (Campbell, 1991).

Ideally, each class within the first three years of school (assuming a structure K-2 dealing with years 5 - 8) should have a full-time teaching assistant as happens in preschools. It is interesting that pre-primary classes for five-year-olds in Western Australia are staffed in this way. Failing this, teachers should be provided with regular part-time assistants, with the larger balance of time going to classes with the youngest children.

The Schools Commission tackled the problem from the other end, by recommending lower classes sizes. They recommended an upper limit of 15 children for Kindergarten (pre-Year 1), 20 for Years 1 - 2, and 25 for Years 3 - 6 (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1984).

Recommendation:

The Commonwealth Schools Commission ideal class size standard of 15 children for Kindergarten classes and 20 children for Years 1 - 2 should be adopted by schools, or;

Alternatively, the recommended class size standard could be viewed as an adult:child ratio of 1:15. As in preschool programs, staff making up this ratio could consist of one trained teacher and one full-time assistant.

In either case, the effective ratio should be reduced to 1:15 in Kindergarten classes and 1:20 in Years 1 - 2 as quickly as possible. While working to achieve this ratio, classes with ratios lower than this should immediately be provided with the help of part-time teacher aides, with the most time being allocated to the youngest classes.

Routines and Time-tables

Young children need structure. Some children will need more structure than others. All classrooms should have predictable routines running through each day, and children should have permanent personal space to store their belongings and to retreat to. Structure does not imply rigidity. Children also need opportunities to become deeply involved in activities that interest them, to finish complex games and projects, and to have time to think and reflect on what they have done or would like to do. Timetables that involve changes of activity every 20 minutes to half hour do not permit this, especially when children are grouped and re-grouped throughout the day. Research studies reported by Nash (1989, cited in Gareau & Kennedy, 1991) suggest that children's task orientation diminishes over the course of a year in kindergarten programs which are overly segmented. An integrated curriculum makes this looser organisation of the day more possible, as do approaches such as the Anti-Bias Curriculum (Derman-Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989), which offer ways of infusing many of the new issues to be addressed in schools into the way everything is approached, rather than as a topic to be treated in its own right.

Appropriate class organisation

Plowden (Department of Education and Science, 1967) examined the common practice within infant schools in England in the late 1960s of assigning new five-year-old school entrants to 'reception' classes, from whence they were moved to more permanent classrooms when they were judged to be ready. They were then promoted by age group and/or attainment level until they were old enough and had attained the necessary skills to move on to junior school. This practice was judged to be unnecessarily disruptive, particularly when schools had new intakes of five year olds each term throughout the year. Plowden recommended instead that there be a single

annual intake, and that children be vertically grouped in the ages 5 - 8, retaining a single teacher throughout their three years of school in this section.

She noted that vertical grouping had first been experimented with in infant schools from as early as 1933, and was common practice in the two or three districts in England that had the strongest commitment to the principles of the infant school.

The idea of vertical grouping is thus not new. Its advantages are the greater flexibility offered when chronological ages are mixed in this way. No single set of competencies can be assumed, so that individual children are much more likely to have their differences recognised and catered for. Children are able to learn from each other in both directions--the younger children by modelling the behaviour of the older ones, and the older children through having the opportunity to consolidate important foundation skills being offered the youngest children.

If the curriculum used is open-ended, allowing children to perform at different levels while working together on the same project, this form of teaching can be both manageable and rewarding.

Teaching mixed abilities is much more economically managed within an integrated curriculum approach than in a more structured, segmented program in which reading, writing, maths and other subjects are dealt with separately, with pre-determined objectives already defined for each year level.

Barbour (1990) reviews research directed at studying the relative effectiveness of various approaches to grouping children in classes. She concludes that flexible grouping, especially when implemented as a mix of grouping strategies designed to encourage peer tutoring, has the best educational outcomes for children. Long-term, stable ability grouping came out bottom of the list, especially in terms of its impact on children in the lowest streams.

Most schools in Australia operate some classes with de-facto vertical grouping as a consequence of rules about class size and the vagaries of enrolments of children of different ages. When schools have more than 30 children for a class of one year but not enough for two classes at this level, these 'left-overs' are frequently combined with another group of 'left-overs' from an adjacent year. These mixed age classes are usually called 'composite' classes. Unlike the philosophically based vertically grouped classes, composite classes tend to be viewed negatively by everyone; teachers, parents, school systems, government and the community at large. Just prior to the last election in NSW, in which the number of composite classes became an election issue, the NSW Education Department re-interpreted and re-issued a 1981 evaluation study of composite classes to show that,

> Although composite classes are not everyone's favourite style of class arrangement, this and previous research indicates that composite classes in no

> way disadvantage children educationally or socially and that with goodwill, consultation and commitment, do work quite effectively.
>
> (Sharpe, 1989:Foreword)

A study conducted in Western Australia by Pratt and Treacy (1986) reached similar conclusions, and also illustrated why composite classes were so disliked by teachers. The study compared classrooms in which teachers had Year 1 children with classrooms in which Years 1 and 2 were combined. The teachers in the composite classrooms tended to treat each year as a separate class, planned for them separately, taught them separately, and kept two sets of planning worksheets. These teachers also felt they had to work much harder than teachers with a horizontally grouped class, as they were never able to get relief from working directly with children. This created additional stress. Structuring the classes as they did, they felt the need to begin working with children in one level as soon as they had the other level working independently.

Pratt and Treacy conclude that teachers need more time in pre-service and inservice training directed at teacher management skills and the use of different types of classroom organisation. They say,

> The importance of an informal structure and the use of small-group organisation, particularly in the junior primary years, must be stressed. The advantages of mixed ability and mixed Year level groupings must be made clear. Furthermore, the current tendency for many teachers to adopt formal whole-class organisation for most activities in Year 1 and Years 1-2 should be discouraged.
>
> Inservice and pre-service courses should include a large component on appropriate programming techniques. In particular the importance of the use of open-ended activities that cater for students with a wide range of abilities should be stressed.
>
> (Pratt & Treacy, 1986:57)

The 1986 Queensland report Education 2000 showed that Queensland parents favoured flexible, ungraded classes for Years 1 - 3. A working party exploring age of entry policies also found strong support within Victorian schools for multi-aged or vertical groupings, as these were seen to encourage greater flexibility in implementing a curriculum focussing on the individual. The working party write that,

> The literature also strongly supports the use of vertical or multi-aged groups as a means of eliminating the disadvantages of being the youngest group within the class. Evidence suggests that multi-aged classes heighten the teachers' awareness of the age-related differences, and enable a range of developmental differences to be provided for during the early years of schooling. Therefore, programs are tailored for the strengths and needs of

children with a range of abilities rather than children having to be ready for a particular program and year level.

(Ministry of Education and Training, Victoria, 1991:15)

The Working Party found an increasing number of Victorian schools were working with classes structured in this way, though a majority were not. Other States report small numbers of classrooms taking this approach by choice. By far the most common preferred organisation, however, is one teacher and 30 (or more) horizontally grouped children, with mixed-age composite classes being a common but undesired necessity.

The difficulties in helping teachers work in different ways from those they experienced in their own schooling and in the classrooms where they did their practice teaching should not be minimized. A first step would be to encourage the employment of teachers with specialised training in working with children in informal, integrated, developmentally- based ways. Many State education departments currently have a policy of preferring generalist primary teachers in order to have greater flexibility in staffing schools. These same teachers, however, often lack the skills to work flexibly with children in classrooms.

CHAPTER THREE: ENTRY AND TRANSITION ISSUES

Entry age and timing of entry

Minimum age of entry policies seem to have varied considerably over time in most Australian school systems. Most States and Territories now require that children are five before they enter mainstream schools. In the ACT, children may be four years and eight months, while in Victoria and New South Wales, children may be as young as four years and six months (Ministry of Education & Training, Victoria, 1991).

Australian States for the most part adopted the British model of education which permitted early admission to schools, though the compulsory age of attendance was set at six, unlike Britain which required children to begin school at five. Prior to the widespread availability of preschool programs, many Australian schools admitted children less than five, and even now some States have a few infant schools or early childhood schools that cater for children 3 - 8. Those States/Territories that offer a non-compulsory full day kindergarten program for five year olds report almost universal attendance. Many families would be surprised to learn that this year was not part of the compulsory school program. Queensland and Western Australia offer part-time programs for children in the year before they begin Year 1 in primary school. Their systems currently provide for 12 years of schooling compared to the 13 offered in the other States and Territories.

In many other countries schooling commences at age 6 or 7. Some, such as France and Belgium, have a well-developed preschool system (Ecoles Maternelles) to complement this later provision (Richardson & Marx, 1989, Olmstead & Weikart, 1989). Others, such as the USA and Sweden, have not had universally accessible preschool programs. In the US, individual school systems are tending to 'add-on' early childhood programs in response to local need. In Sweden, a policy of universal child care and preschool provision has forced a re-thinking of the policy of delaying school entry until children are 7. Child care and preschool cost more than formal primary schooling. The Swedes are envious of Australia's early childhood education program in schools, as they recognise that their present formal method of education will have to be adapted for younger children (Senior bureaucrat, City Administration, Stockholm, personal communication). The Soviet Union has also recently altered its age of entry to mandatory schooling from seven to six. With the change has come a policy to change the curriculum from 'pressure-cooker, pre-academic type programs' to programs incorporating play activity based on information about cognition and development in young children. Standardised texts and teaching methods are now prohibited for this age group (Hoot, 1989:276).

Victoria is currently examining its age of entry policy. Among the reasons given for this re-assessment is a survey showing that many parents are delaying children's entry into school on the grounds that four and a half is too young. A discussion paper

issued by the working party reports that, although research evidence is contradictory, teachers and parents supported raising the age of entry (Ministry of Education & Training, Victoria, 1991).

Apart from minimum age is the issue of when to enter. A number of possibilities exist, and have been tried in different systems at different times. The main options are single entry at the beginning of the year, dual entry, often at the beginning and mid-point of the year, and continuous entry on the 5th birthday or at the beginning of the term following the 5th birthday. Continuous entry policies frequently have a mid-year cut-off.

Some systems, such as the ACT, have tried continuous entry with mixed success. Murray (1987), in reviewing research on enrolment procedures for the ACT Schools Authority during their review of this policy, concluded that the disadvantages of any enrolment policy stem from the disparity in relative ages of children who end up together in classes, and the way these differences are managed by the school, rather than in chronological age per se. Staffing policies can be an important determinant in teachers' preferences for single intakes versus continouous entry enrolment policies. Support for continuous entry diminished in the ACT when schools ceased to be staffed on projected maximum enrolments from the beginning of the year. The continuous entry policy used in New Zealand appears to work because of a generous staffing policy.

A working party examining ways of changing enrolment policies in Tasmania found strong support for continuous entry, but both the profession and the community believed that its implementation would require a considerable change in attitude (Education Department Tasmania, 1989). Under current policy, children are divided into two groups on the basis of their birthdates. One group is entitled to a full year of preschool, then enters school in Year 1. The second group gets a year of preschool and then enters Year 1, skipping Prep Year (Kindergarten) altogether. This policy is seen to be unfair, as the Prep experience is considered an important introduction to school for all children.

School readiness

Lambert reviews research concerned with age of entry, measures of 'school readiness', and school performance. She concludes that 'The real problem of school age entrance may not be when but how' (Lambert, 1987:11).

The concept of school readiness has re-asserted itself recently in the US as a consequence of a national policy to ensure that 'by the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn' (NAEYC, 1990). NAEYC argues that the policy discriminates against children who are developmentally slower than most, as these children are kept out of school until they are 'ready'. As a consequence, the policy is placing preschool and kindergarten programs under extreme pressure to 'school'

children in narrowly defined, discrete skill areas. A NAEYC Position Statement on school readiness asserts that it is the responsibility of schools to meet the educational needs of children who attend, not the responsibility of children to prove they are ready for school. The only non-discriminatory educational enrolment policy is one based on chronological age.

Recommendation:

Entry policies should be matched with structure and style of classroom teaching to minimise the difficulties caused by the particular policy adopted. Single entry permits everyone to be oriented at the same time, but age differences will be at their widest. Continuous entry permits every child to start school at the same age but requires constant initiation of newcomers, and accommodation of the group to them. Other options provide less extreme mixes of these advantages and disadvantages. There does not appear to be any obvious 'best' way. **Once again, though, a more open structure within the 5 - 8 age group minimises the problems caused by unequal amounts of time spent by children in the first year of school due to birthdate. Systems should also bear in mind that decisions they make with regard to enrolment procedures have large impacts on early childhood programs feeding into primary schools.**

For the sake of those families who move interstate while children are in school, there seem to be good arguments for introducing uniformity between States in the ages children start school, and the structure of the education system generally. A standard 13 years of education beginning with kindergarten for 5 year olds, being the most common pattern, should be adopted by all States and Territories.

Transition

Coming to 'big school' represents a challenge to most children, even those with lots of experience in early childhood programs beforehand. David (1990) reviews recent research on factors which affect the ease with which children settle into school. A significant aspect of this 'settling in' process is learning to place the experiences of school into the context of the child's earlier learning. Children entering school encounter a number of discontinuities with previous experience. They have much less access to adult attention, the regime may be quite different, eg less choice, less space, and there may be new expectations from the teacher, who may use a new teaching style.

Cleave et al. (1982) documented many of these differences between preschools and infant schools in Britain. Most striking perhaps was the dramatic swing in the balance of the curriculum towards verbal and symbolic activities (32.4 percent in infant classes compared to 7.2 percent in pre-schools) and away from the arts (8.1 percent compared with 17 percent) and gross motor activities (1.3 percent compared to 17.3 percent),

reflecting a different sense of purpose as well as different levels of resources.

Tayler's PhD research found much the same pattern of differences between Preprimary and Year 1 classes in Western Australia (Dr Collette Tayler, personal communication), as did Cullen (Halliwell, 1991). Mellor (in press) argues that these differences arise from different views of purpose, philosophy and teaching method which stem from the very different histories of the preschool and the infant/primary school sectors and the different emphases provided in their separate teacher training programs. Preschool teachers have been taught to enhance children's development through a variety of strategies. Primary teachers, in contrast, have been trained to teach children curriculum subjects. Infant specialisation helped teachers use developmentally appropriate activities to enhance children's understanding and mastery of curriculum subjects.

The development of an early childhood specialisation spanning the age range 0 - 8 has done much to eliminate the old divisions in philosophies between preschool and the first years of school. The Australian/New Zealand Statement of Principles to Guide the Education of Children in the Early Years of School is not very different in flavour from the recently released Early Childhood Curriculum Guidelines: 3-5 Year Olds prepared by the Victorian Office of Preschool and Child Care (1991).

However, as Mellor also acknowledges, infant/primary classes have always struggled with the constraints of imposed curriculum, large group size, and limited spaces filled with standard classroom furniture. Even when early childhood trained junior primary teachers wish to offer programs similar in nature to those given in preschools, external constraints and isolation make this very difficult.

Staffing policies that fail to distinguish between early childhood classes and the rest of primary school exacerbate further the disparities between children's experiences in early childhood classes and in preschools. Teachers whose training has not provided them with the expectations or the skills needed to work in a child-centred way with young children will not find a written policy and/or an in-service workshop adequate preparation for the task.

Most schools employ at least some of a range of useful techniques to ease the shock for children when they first start school. Among these are gentle admissions procedures (staggering the first day of enrolment, encouraging parents to stay for a while, letting the children come after the rest of the school has started), pre-entry school visits by children, and explanatory booklets, talks and videos for parents. In addition, David (1990) advocates that teachers in primary school also need to visit the early childhood programs in their surrounding district, and to participate in exchange visits of teachers between the early childhood program and the school. David stresses that schools should consider adapting to meet the child, rather than expecting other early childhood programs to 'prepare' the child for school as often seems to be the case (Davies & North, 1990).

Local child care services also need to be considered when developing transition mechanisms, especially in New South Wales where attendance at preschool is estimated to be as low as 40 percent of eligible children. In other States and Territories, percentages of eligible children attending preschool programs vary from 75 to 98 percent (Committee of Review of Preschool Education in the ACT, 1989). Work-based and work-related child care in which services are located at or near the place of work present particularly difficult transition challenges, as children will attend many different primary schools none of which will necessarily be in the neighbourhood of the child care centre. Schools near work-based child care centres can help by developing links with them. Even though children may not attend that particular school, their experiences visiting 'big school' will help them prepare for their own school when the time comes. Such links provide benefits for children and staff in both the school and the child care centre.

Cleave et al. (1982) highlight the importance of such physical factors as the location of the rooms to be used by the child, such as different classrooms, the library, lunch area, school hall, and most especially the toilet. Children will find their way around in 'big school' most easily if these areas are near each other.

If all teachers working in the first three years of school have specialised early childhood training, as advocated earlier in the paper, they will have well developed knowledge of the range of services feeding into their classroom, and are much more likely to interact with children in familiar ways. As they work in primary school alongside teachers of older children, the upward transition need not be difficult, particularly with the development of K - 12 or 1 - 12 curricula.

Ease of entry into school is made more complex when both parents (or a single parent) work. Some children do not have the stamina to manage a full day, five days a week when they first start school. Many schools let kindergarten children leave early for the first few weeks and encourage a few individual children to have a day at home occasionally when school is too tiring for them. Parents sometimes keep children home in this way, even if the school has not suggested it. Both the shorter day and the respite day are more difficult options for working parents. Schools really need to examine their approach if children are getting too tired. Some schools sensibly allow those few children who still need afternoon sleeps to go to sick bay.

Recommendation:

Schools should consider the needs of children in early childhood classes when allocating available space within the school. Wherever possible children in K - 2 should be provided with easy access to the playground, toilets and sufficient classroom space to permit the creation of permanent space for varied play as well as table and storage space.

Schools should aim to ensure that early childhood classes are taught by teachers qualified in early childhood studies.

Informal early childhood networks

In many parts of the country, informal networks of early childhood teachers have begun to develop. By giving often very isolated early childhood teachers in schools, preschools or child care centres opportunity to mix together and share common concerns and interests, much can be achieved to break down old barriers and diminish the likelihood of serious discontinuity between programs for children.

Early childhood schools

Since the early childhood field maintains that there should be continuity of programs within the early childhood age range, there would appear to be good arguments for organising schools differently to eliminate the large break between school and other early childhood programs.

There are already some early childhood schools in Australia that cater for children 3 - 8 years of age. In the current climate of concern for educational standards and the push for the early acquisition of skills, most early childhood professionals would have reservations about such young children joining the formal school system. Their reservations would probably also apply to any large scale plan to re-organise schools to cater for children 3 - 8 until the average classroom for children K - 2 was managing to implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum with more ease.

In the longer term, however, these kinds of developments could make sense. In the meantime, much stronger links need to be forged between all the services involved with young children, including much closer working relationships between all the government authorities responsible for these services.

As Gerald Ashby put it in his response to the paper Early Childhood in Australian Schools: Future Directions:

> The period of birth - 8 years is generally accepted as a distinct developmental phase in the life cycle. This is not, of course, to say that something dramatic occurs between, say, 7 and 9 years of age. Rather, it suggests that there are continuities within the early childhood phase and between this phase and middle childhood that need to be teased out and acknowledged.
>
> The present organisation of early childhood services has resulted from decisions about the age of compulsory entry to schools, the orgnisation of curricula and the management of schools. The practices that have emerged from these decisions have produced discontinuities in terms of developmental

experience. Precompulsory and post compulsory subsets of early childhood education have significant differences in philosophy, curriculum emphases and teaching practices.

The objective, therefore, should be to break down the discontinuities in relation to service provision, to strengthen the continuities and create a dynamic partnership between the various service providers and other stakeholders, across the whole early childhood phase.

In order to achieve a dynamic partnership it is essential that schooling is not seen as something that commences at shome arbitrary age. Entering primary school, like birth, is simply an event within a stream of events. Thus, distinctions between 0-5 years and 5-8 years periods have to be smoothed out. This implies the creation of strong links between the various services involved (eg home, child care, kindergarten/preschool, lower primary, etc) and also the various statutory authorities responsible for regulating these services. Even more important it implies that all service providers orientate their focus on children's progression through the various institutional arrangements we have invented.

Integrating preschool and primary school

Some States/Territories have sought to minimize transition problems by integrating preschool programs into a continuous P - 2 program. Tasmania did this some time ago, while the ACT is experimenting with this approach, though in the ACT it would probably be a P - 6 program, as the ACT at this stage does not recognise early childhood in schools. Some consider that in Tasmania at least, this approach has helped to 'filter upwards' the early childhood ethos of focusing on the child. Others, in other States, feel that closer contact between preschool and primary school has resulted in a trend during the 1980's towards more formal, academic approaches being adopted in the preschools.

In other States, too, there is evidence of an attempt to modify approaches within schools to make teaching practice more consonant with early childhood philosophy. New South Wales has issued a policy statement endorsing an early childhood approach to teaching in Kindergarten (NSW Department of Education, 1986) and the Northern Territory is working on a policy statement supporting an integrated curriculum approach. However, meaningful change requires more than the development of policies and curricula. In a report of the P - 10 curriculum review in Queensland, the Queensland Department of Education acknowledges that there are considerable gaps between theory and practice:

> In spite of general acceptance of the notion of continuity, there was a widespread feeling that the concept is difficult to put into practice. School

practitioners have expressed the need for guidelines and examples illustrating ways in which continuity can be implemented in the school situation.

Some school practitioners said that the problem lies with the structure of the P-10 curriculum, the physical plan of schools, and the organisational structure of the Department of Education and the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. A few teachers said that teaching approaches which are compatible with the notion of continuity are needed.

Many contributors throughout the educational community felt that there is an inconsistency between the developmental base of the P-10 curriculum and the age-grade progression structure in schools....

...Participants at many consultations declared there are problems associated with interfaces at certain levels of schooling, and that these interfaces are another gap between the theory of and practice in continuity....

...Of those who talked of the interface between preschool and Year 1, some felt that the two sectors were becoming more closely linked. However, most felt that a lot more work should be done in this area. It was also strongly felt that, although it is valuable for Year 1 to be more closely linked to preschool, it would be undesirable for preschool to become absorbed by the primary school culture. Discussions with early childhood teachers and curriculum developers revealed the view that preschool should retain its own culture and yet still provide continuity with Year 1.

(Queensland Department of Education, 1991:17-19).

Halliwell expresses concern for the impact of the introduction of P-10 or K-12 curriculum frameworks on early childhood classes (1990). Eliminating discontinuities inevitably means becoming more alike. There is concern that the curriculum frameworks being adopted by systems push the early childhood curriculum towards inappropriate primary and secondary methods and objectives.

In Western Australia the Beazely Committee in 1984 noted the lack of continuity between preprimary and Year 1 programs and recommended that staffing and educational arrangements be better co-ordinated across these sectors. Although there was no official response to this recommendation, early childhood educators attempted to bridge the gap informally but had limited success due to rigidities within Junior Primary schools. As Stubbs (1988:12) reports:

The Education Department recommends one intake for school starters in February of each year. It also requires a teacher to develop all children to a particular standard and to impart to them a pre-determined amount of knowledge within twelve months. This places immense pressure both on the

teacher and child, resulting in programs which are frequently inflexible and based on formal skill acquisition. Individuality vanishes and with it any hope of real continuity.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARENTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Parent expectations

Parents are as individual as their children, and consequently are likely to have a wide range of expectations of schools and other early childhood programs. There is some research evidence concerning parent expectations of preschool programs. Ebbeck (1987) found that South Australian parents' most common expectation was that preschools would help with social, emotional and self growth. Moral growth was the next most frequent choice, followed by helping the child to learn. Preparing the child for school (skill development) ranked fifth in a list of seven options provided. A study of families in New South Wales using either the Kindergarten (preschool) or the child care program at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre similarly stressed the importance of group experience provided by centre-based children's services, from the parent's perspective. Child care parents tended to see child care as a service for parents, and Kindergarten as a means of preparing children for school, while parents using the Kindergarten program saw it more as providing for children's play, enjoyment and exploration (Larritt, 1987).

A study of parent users of long day care centres in the ACT similarly found that the presence of other children was more commonly seen to be the main advantage of centre care than factors such as having a developmentally challenging program (Gifford, 1988). In this study, parents rated an educationally based program as an equal second with the program's being a loving and caring one as their main reason for choosing centre-based child care. Another study of preschool and child care users in the ACT found that parents rated the educational component in both preschool and child care programs as being important (Small, 1989). A review of preschool education in the ACT summarised parent submissions as indicating that parents viewed preschool as an important introduction to formal schooling for both parents and children. Preschools were seen to differ in this regard from child care programs that were not formally part of the education system (Committee of Review of Preschool Education in the ACT, 1989).

Less research evidence is available on individual parent expectations of programs offered in the first years of school. The Effective Schools Project presently being undertaken by the ACER for the Australian Education Council has been established to provide current data on parent and community expectations of schools generally. It is to be hoped that the project team will examine parent views in relation to the early years of school and will devote separate attention to this area in its report.

A Queensland research project is currently under way which intends 'to explore the perceptions of parents and teachers involved in early childhood education (P-3) in relation to the purposes of early childhood education, of learning and education and of children's development and progress within a range of educational settings'

(Ministerial Consultative Council on Curriculum Steering Committee 7, 1991, Executive Summary). The project will include child care services, kindergartens, preschools and the first three years of primary school and should provide unique information on how these settings interrelate.

The collective view of parents is more easily identified and can be found in the policies of parent organisations. State parent organisations have developed policies that support the need for better co-ordination of all early childhood services provision, including the Junior Primary school years (Victorian Federation of State School Parent Clubs [VFSSPC], 1991, Federation of School Community Organisations [FOSCO], 1991). The NSW Federation of School and Community Organisations has stated that 'Arrangements for childcare, preschool and the first years of schooling should reflect learning as a continuous experience. Within the wide range of experiences needed for the total development of the child, the importance of the concept of learning through play and through informal interaction with peers and adults should be stressed.' The Victorian Federation of State School Parent Councils believes that 'Schools and systems [should] review the programs provided in the early years of schooling in order to ensure provision of a flexible, developmental program through which children progress at their own rate irrespective of grade/year levels.'

Parents universally want what is best for their children. Their ideas of how this is to be achieved may be shaped by their own experience in school, as well as by the nature of their relationship with their child's teacher and the quality of the feedback they receive on the school's goals and their child's progress in the classroom.

As knowledge of the course of cognitive development and its dependence on a range of early stimulating experiences and opportunities to explore has grown and been spread to parents through a wide variety of parenting books and magazines, parent expectations of early childhood programs of all kinds have altered. Parents now demand developmentally-based programs from a very early age (Laing, 1990), and many feel the need for tangible signs of 'work' as distinct from unguided play once their children are three or four, placing teachers under pressure to send home paintings or other evidence of children's 'learning' (Milne, 1989).

Once children reach 'big school', many parents expect a more rigorous attempt to teach academic skills. Worksheets showing the child copying dotted lines to form letters, or drawing circles around pictures of things that begin with a particular speech sound are convincing evidence that this has begun. Samples of uncorrected children's early writing, which many early childhood teachers may encourage in the first year or two of school, may disturb parents who feel that the children are being encouraged to learn bad habits in relation to spelling.

Parents will support teachers and their methods when they are convinced that the teachers know what they are doing, that the teachers have detailed knowledge of what the child is doing and share that knowledge with parents, and have concrete

educational plans for the child's progression. Parents also want normative information on how their child's progress sits alongside age-related expectations and want to feel comfortable that the teachers' assessments match their own observations of their child's competencies at home. The issue of assessment and reporting will be examined further in another section of this paper.

Strenthening the partnership with parents

Schools can have no better ally than their children's parents. Although overworked teachers may feel that they do not have time to get to know parents well, an effective working relationship with parents will make other aspects of teaching easier and ultimately more effective. It is much easier to discuss problems of child behaviour with a parent after an effective working relationship has been established than before. Many parents already know this, and make a point of developing this relationship. Teachers need to take the initiative with parents who are less confident in schools, and who may be very intimidated by teachers. These are the parents whose involvement in school will ultimately matter most for their children's educational attainment.

The meaning of partnership

Working effectively with parents means much more than getting to know the individual parents of children in a class, however. Teachers and parents need to be partners if schooling is to be truly effective. This partnership needs to be evident at the level of the individual parent and teacher as well as collectively within schools between teacher and parent groups, and within school systems between administrative bodies and representative parent bodies.

In one sense, teachers and parents are always partners in the task of socialising and educating children. The partnership exists regardless of whether it is recognised as legitimate or real. Teachers acquire those parenting responsibilities associated with care and duty towards the child during the school day. Conversely, whether they intend to or not, and irrespective of teacher's wishes, parents begin the task of teaching long before their children reach school age, and continue contributing to children's learning outside school hours throughout each child's school career.

Much evidence suggests that parents are, in fact, the child's most important teachers and have a more powerful influence on children's school performance than teachers have (Carrick, 1990, Eastman, 1989, Topping, 1986, Pugh, 1983). Both the Coleman Report in the US and the Plowden Report in the UK showed

that family background and attitude to schooling had more to do with a child's school success than inputs from school.

An effective partnership between parents and teachers in schools recognises the important, but different, educational roles both parents and teachers play in relation

to the child's overall learning, the primacy of parent responsibility for their individual children, the primacy of teachers' responsibility for professional input and methods of pedagogy, and shared responsibility for establishing educational goals and developing the full range of policies that set out the parameters within which teachers work and schools operate.

The partnership model implies an openness about what is occurring in schools and requires that schools ensure that parents know what is happening, and why. Most importantly, a partnership means that parents are involved with schools, not at their invitation, but by right and in ways that they have negotiated. It needs to be acknowledged that many teachers and principals are uncomfortable with this definition of partnership, as it seems to diminish their power and control over classrooms. Parents, too, sometimes prefer to leave schooling 'to the experts', particulary when they have been alienated from schooling by their school experience. Individual parents will want to become involved in schools in many different ways, and a wide variety of strategies to define the partnership should be developed to make this possible (ACSSO, 1991).

Although the word partnership appears in much of the rhetoric associated with parent involvement in schools, it is probably true that much remains to be achieved to translate the words into reality in schools and school systems. The concept of partnership implies a substantial shift from older notions of the work of professionals. This can be threatening for both the professional and the client, and requires new skills of both. Just as doctors are struggling to re-define their role as professionals vis a vis their patients and are having to learn how to communicate with them in order to jointly manage each patient's condition, so teachers and schools need to learn how to open up their practice to parents. The discomfort felt by teachers and parents in the partnership relationship stems from a lack of skills to support working together in this new way.

There is overwhelming evidence, however, that parent involvement in schools leads to better child outcomes (Greenberg, 1989, Henderson, 1988, Pugh, 1983). The first years of school are critical ones for establishing strong and co-operative relationships between parents and schools. Once begun, parents, with help from schools, can build on this early relationship to become true partners in the education process. Early childhood teachers need to have much more training in working in partnership with parents than now occurs in teacher training courses to support their ability to involve parents in their children's education.

Mechanisms for collaboration

Teachers in the early years of school have more opportunities for informal meetings with parents than do teachers of children whose parents no longer attend the school daily to drop them off and pick them up. Classrooms in which parents *come inside* in the mornings and afternoons will provide the most opportunity to exchange

information about events of importance to the child at home and in school. Physical clues to the nature of the child's actitities during the day will enable parents to ask *specific* questions in conversation with their child about how the day has gone, and get long and excited answers in response. All parents know that the general question, 'What did you do at school today?' seldom leads to any answer beyond, 'I don't know', or 'nothing.'

Many early childhood classes also use parents in the classroom, often to listen to reading, help in the library or other such specific tasks but sometimes also to help in more general ways as a means of reducing the child/adult ratio in the classroom.

Children place enormous value on seeing their parents and teachers together (Connell et al., 1982). Schools which include parent participation in the classroom, or even the canteen, need to consider the impact of these policies on those children whose parents never come because of work commitments. It is important for these families also to have opportunities for meaningful involvement with the school program, and for children to be aware of their parents' role in the school.

Some schools hold weekend or late afternoon 'sausage sizzles' as a means of opening up access to all families. Breakfast or lunch time events may also be successful.

Schools that have before and after school care programs operating within the school also help to make the connections between home and school for the child. Often staff and parents form very close relationships. Schools with good links to these programs can capitalize on this relationship to involve parents they may otherwise seldom see.

Most important, however, is a climate of acceptance within the school that today's parents do work, and are entitled to do so. Just as notes home should not imply that either Mums or Dads are automatically the only parent interested in the message, schools need to be sensitive to communications of any kind that signal an assumption that one parent is at home and available to work in canteens, help on excursions, attend a mid-morning school concert, or sew up a costume for a school play at short notice. Many parents, given enough notice, will willingly make arrangements to get enough time off to come to the concert, but will appreciate schools meeting them half-way.

In addition to informal mechanisms for bringing the school and family closer together, schools need formal procedures for ensuring the regular exchange of information. Many schools hold information nights at the beginning of each year to introduce teachers to parents. Regular newsletters keep parents informed of school events and policies (and are still apt to get home and be read by parents of this age group). It is important, though, that communication is two-way. Formal mechanisms for receiving information from home need to be instituted as well. Parent/teacher interviews are the most commonly used mechanisms for this. As important as opportunity, however, is an attitude that acknowledges that parents are experts from

whom teachers have much to learn, especially about their particular child, but also about cultural norms and expectations and parents' perspectives generally.

Reporting to parents

Reporting children's progress needs to be undertaken within a partnership framework. In a document entitled Reporting students' progress and achievements to parents, the State Board of Education of Victoria offers the following advice to its Minister:

> Good schools aim to develop a partnership among parents, teachers and students based on shared expectations and understanding of education. Good reporting, based on effective participation, both depends on this partnership and enhances it.
>
> A reporting process based on principles of participation will have two essential characteristics. First, it will be responsive, so that parents and teachers will be able to discuss a student's progress whenever they see the need; and secondly, it will be based on clear and comprehensive information about school's curriculum and assessment.
>
> (Victorian State Board of Education, undated:2)

Parents and policy

Parents have an important role to play in shaping policy for their children's schools. Brown, Cahir & Reeve (1987) argue that goals for equality of outcome in schools will not be achieved without enlisting the full partnership of parents in the development of educational policy. Many view the development of school councils in many States and Territories as important new opportunities for parents to participate in the development of school policy. One of the concerns being expressed with devolution is that schools are increasingly occupied with day-to-day management, while policy areas such as curriculum development are centralising. Parent involvement in schools could easily be reduced to helping principals decide between paying for minor maintenance or the purchase of needed school supplies. At the systems level, there is concern that the new managerialist style of decision-making is reducing effective input from parent organisations. In a recent submission to the NSW Report, Teacher Education: Directions and Strategies, the NSW Federation of School Community Organisations (FOSCO) wrote, 'One of the major fears about the Schools Renewal process expressed by parents and teachers alike is that they are being 'used' as cheap labour but excluded from the policy making areas especially curriculum' (NSW FOSCO, undated:3).

Schools as community

Social planners in Canberra consciously used the school as a focus for the development of a sense of community within neighbourhoods (Shorthouse, undated).

Undoubtedly, local schools have always served this function to greater or lesser degrees, depending on the availability of other commonly used institutions within a town or suburb.

Planners in Canberra considered the school to be important within the neighbourhood for a number of social reasons, seeing the school often as the one uniting and common social space in an otherwise isolating, private environment. Many parents first meet their neighbours while waiting at the school door for school to break up, or at P & C meetings. Local schools that become important in the social fabric of parents' lives will also work better for young children. Small, neighbourhood schools within safe walking distance of home and local shops help young children integrate their life at home and at school and in the local neighbourhood. They meet the parents of their friends in the shops after school, or as they ride their bikes around the neighbourhood at weekends. The woman in the tuckshop is the woman at the end of the street. Most importantly, the friends they make at school will live close to home.

Most school systems are experiencing financial restraint, and many are examining the need to rationalise existing school facilities as school populations in older areas decline. There appear to be strong reasons for retaining the principle of the neighbourhood school whereever possible, however, especially for schools catering for children 5 - 8. American educationists now concede that one of their biggest mistakes was the school consolidation program during the 1960s and 1970s, which saw the creation of massive regional primary schools that children reached by buses coming from all over the district (Earline Kendall, personal communication).

Strengthening schools through links with the community

Local communities have many resources which can be used by schools when strong links are forged between the school and the local community. Most communities have resources which schools can tap, if the effort is made to discover them. Adults in the community may have knowledge they would be willing to share with the school if invited, as was so dramatically illustrated in the Foxfire project, in which Southern Appalachian school children in the US interviewed their elderly neighbours and documented a wealth of traditional crafts and living skills that had been all but lost as the mountains opened up to the influence of modern Western culture. Local shops and business clubs are often strong supporters of school/community projects, with benefits flowing both ways. Community use of school space after school hours is also an important deterrent to vandalism. School systems that currently charge even non-profit community groups heavily for the use of school space could usefully reappraise the good sense of this.

CHAPTER FIVE: ACCOUNTABILITY OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL-BASED EVALUATION

The community has an enormous investment in school programs, as tax payers, and a legitimate additional interest in school effectiveness as employers of the products of schooling and as responsible parents. It is reasonable for schools to respond to calls for greater accountability. The difficulty is to know how to respond without, paradoxically, damaging the effectiveness of programs in the process. Australia has the advantage of lagging behind moves in this direction in the United States and United Kingdom education systems, and perhaps may learn from those countries' mistakes.

Standardised testing

Measuring school effectiveness is no easy task. If the wrong measures are used school programs may become distorted in an attempt to improve ratings, to the detriment of real educational outcomes for children (Kamii, 1985; Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Kamii, 1990; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991).

In the US in particular, where schools are under the control of locally elected school boards, mandated systems-wide standardised paper and pencil achievement tests have had widespread usage as a means of delivering on promises to make schools accountable. In many American schools, tests are routinely used to screen children before school admittance, and as a basis for promotion to the next grade. As a consequence of the types of tests chosen, school curricula are being affected adversely, according to those who advocate early childhood methods. Many kindergarten classes are becoming highly structured 'watered down' versions of first grade, while preschools also feel pressured to 'get children ready' for school.

> The negative influence of standardized testing on the curriculum is not limited to kindergarten. Throughout the primary grades, schools assess achievement using tests that frequently do not reflect current theory and research about how children learn. For example, current research on reading instruction stresses a whole language/literacy approach that integrates oral language, writing, reading and spelling in meaningful context, emphasizing comprehension. However, standardized tests of reading achievement still define reading exclusively as phonics and word recognition and measure isolated skill acquisition...Similarly, current theory of mathematics instruction stresses the child's construction of number concepts through firsthand experiences, while achievement tests continue to define mathematics as knowledge of numerals... As a result, too many school systems teach to the test or continue to use outdated instructional methods so that children will perform adequately on standardized tests.
>
> (NAEYC, 1988:42)

Regrettably, some school systems in Australia have already moved to introduce systems-wide paper and pencil testing for basic skills, though at least in NSW, the first State to commence testing, a study of the effects of the tests on classroom teaching was to be undertaken as part of the evaluation of the testing program (NSW Education Department, 1989).

Another concern with systems-wide standardised tests, apart from their potential to distort teaching practice, is the lack of useful information they provide to systems, teachers, or parents. If a school's scores are low, what does this mean? What practical steps do teachers need to take in relation to individual children's learning to improve their performance? The tests say what children cannot do, but do not give clues as to why. Tests designed to highlight competencies rather than deficits provide more meaningful data for teachers.

More promising as a means of providing this kind of diagnostic analysis of student competence are the student profiles beginning to be used in Victoria. These profiles are a series of concise descriptive statements, called indicators, arranged in levels of achievement known as bands. They are intended to be based on evidence built up over time, and may be derived from a variety of types of observations rather than a single test. The advantage of profiles for teachers is that they require careful, detailed *observation* of the child.

Even if used in no other way, the act of completing the profiles will provide teachers with valuable information about the children in their classroom. Teachers would have much more explicit and meaningful information to exchange with parents than is often now the case.

Monitoring the system as a whole through the use of profiles is planned from 1992, beginning with the Year 6 population and using the Literacy Profile. In 1993, literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 6, and 9 are to be examined. It is not yet clear whether adding normative standards to what were designed to be individual profiles will prove equally useful. The Victorian government hopes that,

> Reporting in this way could, for example, show overall performance levels across the State of the disadvantaged groups listed as part of the Social Justice Framework: females, Aborigines, the poor, students from low-status backgrounds, rural students, immigrants, and students with disabilities.
>
> (Pullen, 1991:20).

Accreditation of programs

Another approach to quality assurance is to focus on the teacher and other elements of the school environment, rather than on the child. This is the approach adopted by hospitals. The complexities of measuring effectiveness of health care services in terms

of patient outcomes are obvious, and not really so very different from trying to judge schools on the basis of student performance. Hospitals, through an industry-based professional council, voluntarily subject themselves to a thorough inspection by their peers to see if they meet the standards required to be accredited. The standards they must meet are those which, by consensus, are agreed to represent a high standard of health care in hospitals.

A similar system has been developed for early childhood programs in the US by NAEYC, and is now planned for early childhood programs in Australia beginning with long day care centres. Although the accreditation system as a whole is to be voluntary, the Commonwealth is planning to require a subset of standards within the accreditation package to be complied with if services wish to be eligible to receive fee relief subsidies. These mandated standards are likely to relate to features of programs that no child should have to go without. An important feature of the accreditation process is that it is an open one, involving managment committees, staff and parents in a joint examination of the program and collective action towards self improvement before applying for accreditation. Many of the criteria being considered for inclusion in an Australian accreditation system would transfer very easily to schools. Once developed, it would be very interesting to consider applying such a system to school rooms as a self-evaluative tool for the school community.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals in the US have developed their own standards for quality programs for young children (NAESP, 1990), but these remove some of the crucial teacher/child interaction dimensions that characterise the NAEYC standards, in much the same way as the Charter for Teaching proposed in Australia's Teachers ignored teachers' need to care for children as part of their teaching task. Australian standards for early childhood programs ought to be able to address the care and education components of high quality programs much more effectively.

CHAPTER SIX: SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Assisting parents to be teachers of their own children

There are many ways in which schools can recognise and enhance the power of parents to support their child's learning. Successful programs such as the Family Maths Project Australia (FAMPA) have been developed and implemented in some places (Vasey, 1990). In addition to these sorts of projects, however, the Australian Parents Council argues that much more remains to be done to ensure that more than lipservice is paid to parents' role as educator (APC, 1991). As well as actions that would enhance school/parent relationships and support parents to share the teaching role with teachers, they extend their argument to a view that schools should become involved in providing parenting skills education to parents. While most people agree that parenting education and support systems are vital services for families, and that much more in the way of family support needs to be made available, many would question whether these services are best provided by schools.

Intervention programs

The Report of the Committee of Review of New South Schools (the Carrick Report) asserted that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children, and are, in fact, their children's most influential teachers. To quote:

> All of the studies, inquiries and reports identified the powerful influence of parents on the motivation for learning and educational success of their children. There is no doubt that the learning which occurs in the early years provides the foundation for future learning, that parental interest and the home environment significatnly influence the child's achievement at school and that the more effective the parents are as the child's first teachers the better prepared the child will be when formal schooling commences. Equality of opportunity and social justice require that every child should receive the best possible start in life.
>
> The motivation given to children by their parents, the quality of the learning environment in the home, the degree of contact and involvement of the parent with the school and the support of well-trained, dedicated teachers at the school are seen as the most significant factors in children's educational success.
>
> (Committee of Review of NSW Schools, 1989:80)

The Carrick report argued that much education reform targeted at programs in schools for children six years and upwards was aimed in the wrong direction and ignored what is known about human development. Instead of trying to take over parental responsibilities in schools, government should re-direct funds to support parents to do

their teaching tasks better in the years before the child begins school. The report recommended that the Education Ministry develop a program similar to the Parents as Teachers Project (PAT) developed in Missouri. This is a co-operative program between the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and four school districts. Its aim is to provide educational guidance and support for parents from the child's birth to three years of age. Not all early childhood experts in the US view school-based intervention programs of this kind favourably, and the project has met with some scepticism from the early childhood profession in this country. Major cutbacks in Head Office staff within the NSW Department of School Education have made the continued development of this project uncertain.

While few would argue with the thrust of the Carrick Report's emphasis on the importance of the early years, some would prefer to see parent support programs managed by agencies other than schools, and to see instead greater emphasis on reforming the role of specialist early childhood teachers and advisors *within* schools (Early Childhood Unit, undated).

American schools are turning to intervention programs in desperation because of increasingly evident social disintegration in the communities they serve. Many of the problems schools face are caused by acute poverty and hopelessness resulting from an almost complete neglect of social policy programs over a number of years. Education policies need to be firmly linked with policies relating to health, income, housing and employment. If these issues are addressed first, parents are in a much better position to manage their reponsiblities as their child's first teacher.

The role of schools in relation to child care

As there is a growing consensus that care and education cannot be separated in any meaningful way, some might argue for the creation of combined schools and child care programs for children 0 - 8 years of age as Zigler does in America. Betty Caldwell argues that schools of today were designed for demographics characteristic of a very different society. She considers that 'once we fully understand today's demographic realities, the question of whether schools should provide day care will become totally obsolete (Caldwell, 1986:37). In her view, in order for services to be relevant to the needs of today's families, they must provide *both* care and education.

Caldwell was instrumental in developing an experimental primary school program in Arkansas, which, in collaboration with the University of Arkansas established a school with extended hours care programs for children aged 6 months to 12 years of age. Businesses in the US have also begun to establish combined work-based child care and primary schools (Creed, 1991).

Sweden is experimenting with combining care and education in its schools, at least in Stockholm. Sweden has an extensive Leisure Centre programs, which provides care

for children after school. In a few schools, attempts are being made to integrate the teaching and child care staff, so that the teaching and the leisure program are blended across the full day. This seems to represent an attempt to 'free up' a traditional, formal approach to teaching characteristic of Swedish primary schools.

New Zealand adopted the beginnings of an integrated approach to children's services in 1986, when child care was transferred from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education. The Education Department assumed responsibility for licensing child care centres, paying child care staffing grants and providing advisory and support personnel (O'Rourke, 1987). In an important report Education to be More, Meade (1988) recommended changes which, had they been implemented wholly, might have seen children's services in New Zealand become truly integrated. Instead, the Before Fives's implementation report tinkered with the Meade recommendations in several crucial ways, leaving care and education services still substantially unequal and separated (Meade, 1991, May, 1991). Of the changes, May writes:

> While early childhood wanted incorporation into the funding privileges of the education sector it did not want its energy drained further by endlessly explaining the inappropriateness for early childhood, of the primary and secondary way of doing things to gentlemen, whose knowledge of early childhood comes from their children's attendance at kindergarten thirty years ago! Early childhood is not being well served in the new structures (May, 1991:9).

The New Zealand Education Department dismantled central specialist early childhood advisory services in favour of regional multidisciplinary teams. The devaluing of the importance of expert knowledge of the early childhood field implicit in this move is very much evident in the Australian education system at the moment. Hence the New Zealand example would appear to be a cautionary tale for those who argue for schools to take on responsibility for child care services here. Some time in the future this proposition may have more appeal. When schools recognise early childhood and employ early childhood teachers and early childhood advisory personnel, the rest of children's services may look to closer integration with schools with more interest.

Recommendation:

With the New Zealand experience in mind and because Australia has better developed child care programs than in the US, and a more developmentally appropriate approach to teaching in the first years of school than in Sweden, **the direct linking of schooling and care is less desirable for the time being than a conscious commitment within schools to support child care programs whereever possible**. A few schools in Tasmania have full day child care programs as well as after school care programs, though they are funded and administered outside the Education Department. One school in the ACT has child care for children from 6 weeks of age

on the premises. This program too is funded and managed outside the school system. The most obvious form of appropriate support from schools is to give as much assistance as possible to out of school hours care (OSHC) programs catering for the school's own pupils. In the ACT, where these programs are licensed, advisors claim to be able to tell which schools have positive attitudes towards programs operating in the school building just by observing the program. Program co-ordinators confirm that support from the school makes or breaks the program (Gifford, 1991).

Many schools that were initially hesitant about sharing premises with OSHC programs have found that a good program becomes an important feature within the school which, when parents can select schools as in the ACT and NSW, becomes a draw card for attracting new enrolments, and a source of equiment which can be shared within the school community.

CHAPTER SEVEN: APPROPRIATE PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN 5 - 8 IN SCHOOLS

The nature of the field of early childhood

All of the complex issues relating to teacher pre-service education, induction, and continuing professional development discussed in depth in a spate of recent reports (Schools Council, 1989; Working Party on Teacher Education, 1990; Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1989; National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1990; NSW Ministry of Education, Youth & Women's Affairs, 1990) apply to the problem of adequately preparing and supporting early childhood teachers in schools, with some very complex additional wrinkles. These arise from the multi-faceted nature of early childhood services. In addition to the first three years of primary school, early childhood teachers may work in a wide range of other early childhood settings including preschool programs for children 3 - 5 and child care programs of many different kinds catering for children as young as a few weeks of age (Brennan & O'Donnell, 1986; Rodd, 1988; Halliwell et al., 1989; Weiss, 1989; Tayler, 1990). (A brief summary of the early childhood field as it is currently structured in each State and Territory is provided at the end of this paper.)

Teachers who wish to direct child care centres that enrol babies from as young as 6 weeks, or to work effectively with toddlers, need extensive preparation in the 0 - 3 year age range, and many current courses reflect this change. Teachers who work as centre directors also require the skills of a small business person as well as teaching and supervising skills. Administration and management skills are essential.

Services operating on their own have to be competent in the complex areas of industrial awards, legal responsibilities surrounding child custody and access, occupational health and safety legislation, and public and professional liability and in negotiating the complex maze of obtaining adequate insurance provision for them. If they are to be effective, individual services have to make their own links with local welfare, health and special needs and psychiatric services. Usually, this additional work is the responsibility of the service director. There is no principal or regional or head office to assist.

Often services are new. The director is likely to have responsibility for employing staff, purchasing start-up equipment and may even be involved in vetting building plans, supervising architects and negotiating alterations and repairs for the many features of the building which initially do not work.

Finally, those working within the children's services field are quickly initiated into the arenas of public policy and advocacy. They have to learn how to make delegations to parliamentarians or local government officials, organise public campaigns and network effectively with other services, just to maintain the status quo.

The problems faced by a newly trained Year 1 teacher managing a class of 30 children in a primary school for the first time are not to be minimized. They are, however, less severe than those of new graduates whose first job sees them in a director's role with as many as 15 staff to supervise together with some or all of the extra tasks just described. It is clear that the pre-service and induction needs of these two kinds of teacher will differ, as may workable models for meeting their needs.

Current course coverage

As presently structured, many early childhood teacher preparation courses attempt to prepare students to work effectively in the full early childhood age range 0 - 8 and in the full range of occupational settings. A few cover the even larger range 0 - 12. Larger institutions have begun to permit students to specialise while sharing a common core of subjects (eg the first year in common). Some smaller institutions have narrowed their focus and only offer programs aimed to cover the ages 0 - 6 or 3 - 8 (Tayler, 1990).

The need to specialise

Many early childhood teacher educators believe that 0 - 8 is an unrealistic scope for a four year teacher preparation course (Seefeldt, 1988). This is partly because of the profound developmental changes occurring in children over this age range and partly because the settings in which teachers will work are so diverse, as is the nature of the responsibilities required by different settings. The case for specialisation seems to many to be irrefutable on all but practical and economic grounds. These deserve attention to see whether, with the combined determination and commitment of all decision-makers within higher education institutions, school systems and government, appropriate preparation courses for the whole early childhood field cannot be provided.

One possiblity would be to integrate programs aimed at preparing teachers to work in schools into mainstream primary courses. This would simplify problems associated with models of teacher preparation that assume an employer structure synonymous with that found in schools. Courses preparing teachers for settings outside schools would be separate, and could develop their own more appropriate models. Experience suggests, however, that the 'early childhood' nature of such programs would rapidly fade. This possibility cannot be recommended.

Optimum arrangements seem to require a common early childhood focus for students preparing to work with children between the ages of 0 - 8, with some shared courses but with the requirement to specialise in one of the three areas 0 - 3, 3 - 5 or 5 - 8, as has been recommended for American programs by the Early Childhood Teacher Education Commission in the US and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1982).

Objectors to this proposal are concerned that such specialisation would divide the field (or work to ensure its continued division) and would be impractical because of too narrow employment options for graduates. While supporting the need for an early childhood specialisation, the Institute of Family Studies argues that the further specialisation of early childhood teachers...

> ...may run counter to the main thrust of the paper. The most recent approaches to development and the nature of intelligence hold that children vary widely across multiple intelligences and across the 0-8 age group. It makes more sense then to train teachers to build on individual competences across that age group, than to revert to the rigid 'developmental stages' groupings that have denied the variability in individual children and across age groups.
>
> (Edgar, 1991).

These issues need to be widely debated. Certainly all early childhood education students need significant exposure to the full early childhood age range, and need to be able ultimately to work in any kind of early childhood setting and to recognise and work with individual differences. The very act of specialising in one of the smaller age ranges, however, would give students practice in applying their knowledge in a particular way, and would signal the need to make other adjustments in other settings. The discipline within teaching institutions of developing specialised units for narrower age groups would also contribute substantially to current abilities within the field to make good practice explicit. The sharper focus needed would mean that it would no longer be possible to gloss over issues such as how to work effectively with toddlers.

Another possibility would be a specialisation that helped students work with mixed age groupings. This approach would emphasise co-operative learning within the 0-8 age range, and would give teachers training in how to work with children in family groupings. Demonstration centres might need to be developed initially so that students could gain practical experience and confidence in working in this way.

Sharing course components with other students

There does seem to be merit in all early childhood students having some shared course work with students studying other disciplines, and in students specialising in school-based teaching having some course work in common with other teachers in training. However, professional subjects, ie those relating to working with children and their families, should be specifically designed for early childhood students, and need to be taught by qualified teachers with substantial, successful experience in the areas being taught. Many of these subjects would be useful to students in other disciplines, eg nurses and upper primary teachers and, as in some places such as the Northern Territory now, students undertaking associate diploma courses in child care.

Issues in relation to course content

The same debate over course content occurs in relation to early childhood courses as is raging in other areas of teacher preparation. This concerns the balance between professional subjects aimed at giving the student the specific skills and knowledge needed to be ready to face a classroom at the end of the course, and more general subjects designed to give the beginning teacher the basis for developing truly independent, professional judgement over the course of a career in teaching. The difficulty is that beginning teachers need both.

In the US, moves have been made to eliminate most education subjects from teacher training programs (ie eliminate the undergraduate major in education), ensuring that teacher graduates have solid, subject based degrees before they can be registered to teach (Raths, 1989). The USSR has been moving in the opposite direction, with more practical components being added to their teacher training courses in conjunction with an attempt to free up the teaching style from its previous rigid, academic style (Hoot, 1989). Interestingly, even in the US, many State education bills, in taking up the recommendations of the Holmes Group and the Carnegie Forum (two of the main groups behind the teacher reform movement) have exempted early childhood teachers from the general limitations on the amount of professional course content trainee teachers may have (Haberman, 1988).

In Australia, the movement has been away from practically based training towards a more broadly based education for teachers. This move began when teacher *training* courses became teacher *education* programs within colleges of advanced education and is being accelerated by the creation of the Unified National System of universities and the consequent move of teacher education courses from applied-based CAE's into research oriented universities. Although the present Minister for Higher Education, Peter Baldwin, has stated that he does not wish this move to result in the loss of the previous character of CAE courses, this loss seems inevitable unless promotions criteria within universities and resource allocation practices change. Promotions criteria presently reward research and publication effort rather than teaching. Allocation of staff resources to support supervised practical experience of students in the field is also under threat, and university calendars will need to become more flexible to permit students to fit their field work in when it is needed.

Dowd (1983) gives an overview of the trend from practice to theory in the early development of early childhood courses in Australia. In the Adelaide Training College under Lillian de Lissa in the early 1900's, according to Dowd, two thirds of the student's time was taken up with the practicum. De Lissa believed that the students' main learning was to be had by experience, and the main teacher was the child itself. Students were to learn through careful observation of the child, supplemented by lectures at college.

By 1944, more emphasis was beginning to be placed on theory. In that year the Australian Association for Preschool Child Development (AAPSCD) published Minimum Essentials: a Syllabus for the Training of Preschool Teachers, the first set of curriculum guidelines for national application. These required that of 40.5 hours per week, 24.5 were to be theory-based while 16 were to be practical. Students were no longer to be employees in preschools as a part of their course. The theory hours were to be broken into lectures (8.5 hours), study at college (6 hours) and home study (10 hours).

A study for the ACER conducted in 1943 by Dr Ivan Turner, which compared the offerings within the Kindergarten Training Colleges and other Teachers' Colleges, found that the KTC's spent more time in practical work and child observation than the Teachers' Colleges, but also included more 'modern subjects', for example child development, and less general education subjects.

By 1984, Diploma of Teaching courses in Australia were described by Ebbeck (1984) as consisting of (approximately) 25 percent liberal studies, 50 percent education studies (20 - 25% child development and foundations, 25 - 30% curriculum) and 25 percent field work.

Pressure to reduce the field practice components of courses further escalated during the 1980's, due to the high cost of field supervisor payments (Ebbeck, 1989). A survey of compulsory field experience days in early childhood courses conducted in 1988 revealed a range of 73 to 120 days, with an average of closer to 80. Tayler's 1990 review of early childhood courses showed a similar pattern (Tayler, 1990).

Employers in the field of early childhood are increasingly concerned at the poor preparation in practical skills graduates appear to be receiving from many early childhood courses. Current moves by government to negotiate the abandonment of supervisory payments in schools as part of award restructuring in teaching awards are especially problematic in the early childhood sector, where many different employers and awards are implicated. Solutions to the question of the practicum need to be specifically addressed for the early childhood field.

Minimum early childhood course content

There appears to be widespread consensus that there should not be a single, uniform approach to pre-service courses in early childhood in Australia. There are still significant State-based differences in employment opportunties arising from different children's services regulations and education department policies. Institutions serving rural and isolated populations argue that they have different needs (Sparrow & Battersby, 1990; McDonald, 1990). Institutions themselves will operate within different constraints, making different solutions necessary. There is also the compelling argument that there is never one best way.

There is a growing view, however, that agreed minimum standards for course content are now crucial. For discussion purposes only, the following suggestions are offered as a starting point. Widespread consultation would be needed before any statement could be viewed as sensible or workable. This paper suggests that, as a starting point only, the following standards be considered.

DRAFT MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD COURSES

- All early childhood courses should give students a sound understanding of children 0 - 8 and their families, and practical knowledge of the services designed for this age range.

- Early childhood students should receive specialised training in one of the following areas: 0 - 3, 3 - 5, 5 -8.

- Courses should provide a broadly based grounding in liberal studies, to include arts, humanities, social, physical and behavioural sciences.

- Students should encounter studies designed to contribute to their personal development and capacity to think critically and reflectively about the contexts influencing their values, attitudes and behaviours. These should include interpersonal communication studies, the expressive arts and a choice of study requiring a shift of perspective - eg the history of science, feminist theory, black history, etc.

- Students should have supervised practical experience in two of the three specialisation areas. Overall, they should have a minimum of 100 days of field experience, which should include observation visits to a range of services catering for children in the age range 0 - 8. A minimum of one quarter of the field experience should be with the age group of the specialisation.

- Students should have practical experiences interspersed with theoretical study throughout the course.

- Curriculum studies should support developmentally appropriate practice within the area of specialisation.

- Students should be offered an integrated and inter-disciplinary understanding of learning theory and practice.

- Students should receive a grounding in the principles and methods of working with young children in the age range 0 - 8, but should receive special guidance in applying general techniques to the age group of their specialisation.

Students should receive instruction and practice in observation techniques and workable methods of record keeping.

Students should pursue an area of their own choosing in depth.

Entry requisites:
Year 12 English, maths, science

Staffing requirements: all subjects need to be taught by staff with expertise and substantial, successful experience in the areas being taught. This requirement applies to supervisory staff supporting all practical experiences.

Articulation requirements: every effort should be made to ensure that early childhood courses articulate with related courses, including post graduate courses, which taken as a whole offer multiple entry and exit points for the full range of personnel working in the early childhood field.

CHAPTER EIGHT: INDUCTION AND FURTHER TRAINING AND INDUSTRIAL CONCERNS

Induction

Better methods of inducting beginning early childhood teachers into the workplace need to be considered. Among the challenges for the field in doing this will be the need to resolve the impact of different approaches to induction inside and outside school settings, should these emerge. It is not sufficient to argue, as occurred in the early childhood response to the AEC Working Party proposal for an internship model of teacher induction, that because the model won't work for early childhood services outside schools it should not be developed for the school system either, provided there are grounds for believing that the proposal would result in more effective school teachers.

If schools begin to trial different methods of inducting teachers, as has been recommended, the early childhood field needs to give careful consideration of how other children's services outside schools could adopt (or adapt) some of the same methods, perhaps through the use of regional early childhood personnel to support beginning teachers in more direct ways than now occurs.

Continuing professional development through in-service education and advisory support

It is now well recognised that a pre-service course cannot by itself fully prepare a teacher for a career in teaching. Provision for ongoing professional development is necessary for at least three different purposes: 1) providing particular skills and knowledge at a point at which their relevance can be recognised and the skills themselves can be directly applied; 2) bringing the practising teacher up to date with new methods and insights; 3) renewing energy and enthusiasm for teaching.

Recommendation:
In-service courses should be accredited, and, wherever possible, should give teachers advanced standing in recognised advanced studies.

Teachers also need on-going personal advisory support if they are to work optimally, especially if they are trying to use developmentally appropriate practice within a more traditional, subject-oriented primary school. Advisory personnel need to have specialised expertise in early childhood programs.

Appropriate links between early childhood in schools and the rest of the early childhood field

Many advocates of early childhood education argue for much closer links between all early childhood services including programs offered by teachers in the first years of school. Genuine integration will require much change to occur in breaking down the old but still very much alive distinctions between care and education. These distinctions are nowhere more clearly drawn than in the industrial arena where working conditions and pay for early childhood personnel differ widely according to whether the work is designated 'care' or 'education'. Much higher status, as well as greater monetary reward and shorter working hours still separate educators from carers and will continute to do so, despite mountains of rhetoric and good will to make it different, until industrial treatment is rationalised.

Award coverage within the early childhood field

The industrial chaos within the children's services field has been thoroughly documented by Brennan & O'Donnell (1986) and the ACTU in their evidence to the recent test case for the child care industry (Laing, 1990). Child care personnel are gradually receiving common award coverage under the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union, but teachers and nurses working in child care programs still have industrial links with schools and hospitals respectively in some states.

In some places, teachers in child care have no union coverage, or their award coverage is being re-examined along with coverage of teachers in preschools. Recent rationalisations of the unions involved in child care and preschool in both Queensland and South Australia generated a great deal of concern in the field because of perceived differences in status of belonging to the Australian Teachers Union as opposed to the FMWU. Many early childhood practitioners still feel that the FMWU is the wrong union for child care workers. They still resist being classed as a 'worker' in an 'industry', and would prefer professional recognition and standing. If challenged, however, they will acknowledge that the FMWU has invested a great deal and has achieved more in purely practical terms than any other union to raise the status of all child care workers through the national child care test case (Gifford, 1991; Brennan, 1991).

Questions of how early childhood workers are best represented get caught up in concerns about demarcation disputes between unions. Resolution of the issues will require sensitivity to union concerns, as well as perserverance to work through the problems in the interests of improving programs for children.

What, then, ought to be the nature of professional and industrial links between early childhood teachers in schools and their counterparts in other children's services? Such questions may involve more than pay rates if the tri-partite approach to policy development takes hold in a major way. Unless early childhood teachers in school

manage to link in with the voices of their colleagues in other early childhood programs, they are likely to continue to be unheard and out-voted in the forums of the large teacher unions.

Competency standards

A number of questions arise when considering the advantages and disadvantages for the early childhood field of adopting a competency-based approach to setting occupational standards for teachers. Who sets the standards? How will they be used? If the standards are set by, for example, the industrial parties to an award, what happens to early childhood teachers who work in a range of settings covered by a number of different awards? Will there be mechanisms for helping any competency standards set for teachers to translate from one industry to another?

Competency standards for teachers are being discussed because of a recent government decision to dramatically restructure industry training. Under the new policy, national competency-based standards are to be developed for all workers on an industry by industry basis. These standards, to be registered by the National Training Board, are to serve as the basis for achieving a nationally coherent curriculum for industry training. It has already been agreed by the State training ministers that the States will reciprocally recognise each other's accredited training courses, and industry-based training providers are now able to compete with TAFE colleges in providing accredited training.

The thrust of the changes, copied from similar developments in the United Kingdom, is to free-up training arrangements, make them more flexible and locally responsive, put their control in the hands of industry, and encourage much more on-the-job training. The changes include moving away from 'time serving' notions of training to competency-based training and assessment. Once competency standards and their means of assessment are agreed, skills can be recognised without reference to how they were acquired (Stanford, 1991).

There is already a national pilot project underway in South Australia aimed at developing the capacity to recognise the experiential learning of child care workers who have gained skills and knowledge through work in the child care industry without formal training. The project aims to permit these workers to attain advanced standing in the Advanced Certificate course in child care. Another national project under way in Victoria is aimed at developing a national approach to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for application in child care. This work is occuring at the Broadmeadows College of TAFE in their especially established Centre for Recognition and Assessment.

Training programs designed on the basis of registered national competencies are modular. In so far as possible, each module stands alone, so that appropriate modules can be combined flexibly to meet the individual requirements of workers, filling in

identified gaps or extending skills into new areas, or a combination. The TAFE sector has already embarked on this approach to training, even though very few industries have yet registered their competency standards.

At this stage, only the National Training Board has clear jurisdiction over competency levels 1 - 6, encompassing skills found from entry through to paraprofessional levels (National Training Board, 1991). Training will either be provided by industry, TAFE colleges or some other recognised training provider. The two remaining levels, 7 and 8, belong to professional classifications. These competencies would usually be gained from a university education.

Unless there is a change in national policy, child care competency standards will eventually be developed, possibly by a Community Services Industry Training Advisory Board if Government agrees to establish an ITAB for the community services sector.

Whether there will be competency standards for teachers is less clear. Some professional bodies have worked in conjunction with the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) to develop competency-based standards (Gonczi, Hager & Oliver, 1990). Competency standards at professional level are also being incorporated into industrial awards. It is perhaps through this mechanism that standards will be developed for teachers in schools.
In discussing the advantages of competency-based standards for the professions, Gonczi et al. have the following to say,

> Recent microeconomic reform processes in Australia (industry restructuring, award restructuring, restructuring of education and training) all partly address the removal of unnecessary barriers to free movement of labour. Competency-based standards are of great assistance here because they encompass all forms of achievement of competence, rather than simply relying on formal indicators i.e. paper qualifications. But because the concept of competence can incorporate various *levels* of competence, from entry level through proficiency to expert level, a competency-based system would enable professionals to enter the profession at an appropriate level as, for example, in teaching or nursing or in public sector medicine. This allows maximum use of the skills present in the community. It would also provide a basis for professionals already in practice to have their higher competency levels recognized in an appropriate manner as for example the putative 'master' teacher category proposed for primary and secondary teachers. It would also facilitate the recognition and subsequent employability in an allied field of those who attempt but fail to obtain professional qualifications.
>
> (Gonczi et al., 1990:7)

Much of the debate over competency-based standards for higher-level workers concerns whether it is possible to capture the essence of advanced skills (thinking,

judgement, problem solving and context-bound application of knowledge and decision-making) in the concrete, measurable terms required of competency-based standards (Elliott, 1990). Those who have already been through a similar 'revolution' in the US and Canada some years ago, now abandoned, believe the competency-based approach cannot deliver all it promises, though some believe the attempt to develop standards is itself a worthwhile exercise (Brian Stanford, Director, Adelaide College of TAFE, personal communication).

Strong concern has been expressed within the education community over the new language being used by this training revolution, and its alienation from traditional education values. Some of the resistance within the education community to the new framework may stem from academic snobbery, or as Marginson (1991) more politely puts it, the *social* rather than *educational* distinction that separates general education from the less prestigious vocational education.

But some resistance also stems from an orientation that sees values for education and the wider society beyond narrow, materialistic, economic ones. It will be important for educationists to try to separate simple prejudices from more valid concerns in shaping their response to push for reforms to education and training. It will be particularly problematic for the early childhood field if a major wedge were to be driven between those with qualifications in child care obtained through TAFE and those with other qualifications obtained from degree courses in child care/early childhood education as a consequence of the development of competency-based standards and training up to but not including the professional level.

There are a number of promises for the early childhood field in the move to competency-based standards, especially if they can be developed coherently for the field as a whole, including early childhood teachers in schools. The identification of competencies could put to rest forever old dichotomies between care and education, and provide the basis for parity of esteem and pay among early childhood workers which until now has eluded the field. The common competencies in all early childhood programs would finally be apparent, along with their close nexus with those of other professionals, whether the competencies were technically identified as belonging to teachers or child care workers, and regardless of setting.

But there are serious questions to be addressed before the field can be confident that the introduction of competencies would be positive rather than detrimental. Could the introduction of competencies result in a loss of flexibility, richness and quality in programs? This could happen if competencies cannot be developed which capture the true nature of caring for and educating young children. Could their use give management unprecedented control over previously independent, autonomous workers? If competencies were developed solely by parties to industrial awards, and if unions capitulated to the introduction of unsatisfactory competency-based assessment procedures in the interests of achieving pay increases, much damage could be wrought through their introduction.

There are already some indications that competency standards for teachers are likely. At the July Special Premier's Conference this year it was agreed to develop national competency standards by 1993 for those professional qualifications that require State registration (Special Premier's Conference, 1991). It is also interesting to note that in New Zealand, where, as in Australia there is an attempt to reform industry training structures by adopting competency-based standards, it is proposed that national structures and standards be developed which would include degree level training (National Training Board, 1991).

If competency standards are to be developed for teachers, experience from other fields suggests that it will be important that practicing teachers and parent groups are closely involved with their development, if they are to have any hope of working effectively. Competency standards are currently being prepared for research scientists within CSIRO as part of negotiated agreements between management and unions. They are being developed within the Human Resources Branch (Personnel Department) where there is little or no scientific professional expertise, and are to be vetted by the Professional Officers' Association (the union) (CSIRO Officers Association, 1991). Most bench scientists are vaguely aware of this development, but do not understand the language and have little idea of its import.

Better mechanisms than those apparently being employed within CSIRO need to be adopted to connect professionals who have knowledge of the full nature of their work with those with time and expertise to develop competency-based standards. For early childhood teachers working within schools, this will be particularly important.

Competency-based standards are viewed as a means of assuring overall quality and as a management tool by their advocates (Simosko, 1991). Use of competency standards for this purpose would represent a major departure from current management practice in schools. Teachers' work at present only undergoes appraisal when teachers opt to apply for promotions. McRae (1991), in a paper commissioned by the Schools Council to explore the suggestions about teacher appraisal raised in Australia's Teachers: An Agenda for the Next Decade, makes a case for the development of some form of on-going quality assurance program of appraisal for the teaching profession, arguing that nowhere else are either professionals or workers shielded in the way teachers now are. If competency standards were to be used in conjunction with assessment of individual performance of classroom teachers, as now appears the intention, the close involvement of teachers with early childhood expertise in constructing and assessing standards would be essential.

Recommendation:

Any move to introduce competency standards into schools should be subject to open processes of scrutiny and debate. If competency standards are to be developed for early childhood teachers in schools, practicing classroom teachers and parents should participate in their development, and efforts should be made

to link the competencies identified with those to be developed for the rest of the early childhood field.

The question of competency-based training at the tertiary level

If competency standards are developed for early childhood teachers, then many would argue that teacher preparation at the tertiary level should be delivered in competency-based modules so as to articulate optimally with other training programs in the early childhood field, particularly the certificate and associate diploma in child care, and to guarantee the nexus between teacher preparation and the needs of the early childhood 'industry.' There is still considerable ambivalence about this, however. It is interesting to note that American educators who have had experience with earlier forms of competency-based training rejected the proposal that the NAEYC teacher education guidelines be stated in competency-based terms. Many commented that competency-based teacher education programs tended to be technically rather than theoretically based (Seefeldt, 1988).

CHAPTER NINE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION SYSTEMS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Early childhood issues as they relate to school systems

Some of the issues raised in this paper can be dealt with by individual teachers and parents. Others require support from individual school principals and other staff within the school in co-operation with parent bodies. A few, however, require changes in systems policy if they are to be resolved. The most important of these is the need to re-establish a policy of employing teachers with specialist early childhood training to work with young children in schools.

Whereas every State once recognised the need for specialist knowledge to work effectively with this age range, all Australian education systems have since adopted a policy of the single primary school, mostly K - 6, in which teachers are expected to be able to teach any age group, regardless of specialisation during pre-service training.

Recommendation:

Education Departments need to re-instate the special identity of early childhood classes and begin to document their characteristics. Without a policy of special identity for early childhood classes, the information needed to adequately describe even basic features of these classes in schools is simply not available. Education Departments do not know how many early childhood teachers are teaching in the system, or what age children they are teaching. Before national data can be collected, **an agreed system of early childhood nomenclature needs to be adopted.**
Surveys sponsored by the Australian College of Education in conjunction with the Schools Council, the University of Queensland and Griffith University (Logan et al., 1990) ought to give a national picture of early childhood staffing in schools. Methodological problems associated with the lack of a national vocabulary for the early childhood field, however, prevent the data being interpreted with confidence (Logan, personal communication).

Overall, the survey data reveal a very low percentage of teachers with early childhood education teaching in schools (0.63 percent preschool/kindergarten training, 7.18 percent infants/early childhood training in the government school sector and 0.52 percent and 6.75 percent respectively in all school systems. Since an unknown number of principals passed the surveys on to teachers in attached preschools, the percentage of early childhood teachers in primary school classes is lower than these figures by some amount. One percent of the sample said they worked in the preschool/kindergarten sector, while 10.85 percent of respondents considered they worked in the infants/early childhood sectors, but these figures do not indicate the nature of the training of the teachers in these sectors.

An unpublished cross-tabulation of the 1989 survey data extracting the responses of teachers who indicated that they worked primarily in preschool/kindergarten or infants/early childhood education sectors shows that 11 percent of teachers in government preschools/kindergartens had preschool/kindergarten training, 36 percent had infants/early childhood training, while 46.4 percent had primary training. Of those working in infants/early childhood classes, 0.3 percent had preschool/kindergarten training, 28.6 percent had infants/early childhood training, while 58.6 percent had primary training. The problem with interpreting this data is determining whether teachers teaching five-year-olds in full-day school kindergarten classes put themselves in the preschool/kindergarten category, and whether preschool teachers considered they were early childhood teachers and placed themselves in the second infants/early childhood category.

It is very much to be hoped that the next time this survey is run, national definitions such as those proposed in this paper are used so that the data can be interpreted accurately. It would also be useful if the research team would print out a similar cross-tabulation of the 1989 data showing where teachers with early childhood training are working in schools.

Even with the ambiguities, it can be stated that many primary-trained teachers are working in early childhood classes. Any proposal to give preferential employment in early childhood programs to teachers with early childhood training needs to be implemented in ways that do not disadvantage the existing teaching force. There are at present insufficient early childhood teachers to staff these classrooms in any case. Future staffing appointments, however, should be aimed at recognising the importance of early childhood training. When vacancies occur, early childhood graduates should be sought from now on, and steps should be put in train to increase the proportion of early childhood graduates from teacher training institutions.

This recognition of the particular needs of young children in schools for teachers with early childhood training need not interfere with promotions opportunities for such teachers. There is no reason why an early childhood teacher should not be eligible for any promotion position within a school or system. They should also be able to teach in years 3 - 6 if this is their preference. Closer links with other early childhood services would also open up other career paths for teachers who preferred to advance within an early childhood field.

Systems should also reinstate specialist early childhood advisory and management positions in both their central and regional structures. The loss of early childhood expertise from education support structures is part of a larger trend away from central control of schools to school-based management. It is vital that in the move towards devolution the capacity of systems to support good practice in schools is not completely lost.

Summary and conclusions

This paper has examined briefly a large range of issues of relevance to the early childhood years (K - 2) in schools.
The paper asserts that children 5 - 8 are sufficiently unlike older children to need educational programs that have been designed specifically for them and that are taught by teachers who have been trained to work with young children.

While it is true that the style of teaching throughout primary school has gradually loosened and come closer to an approach into which younger children can be 'fitted', many State education departments have felt the need to issue directives, policies and in-service courses in an attempt to encourage primary-trained teachers to adopt developmentally appropriate practice with their youngest children. When NSW first adopted its enrolment policy permitting children to enter school at four and a half years, this appeared in a memorandum to principals:

> This new policy will allow the enrolment of children from the age of 4 years 6 months. It therefore becomes imperative that appropriately informal programs are provided in all kindergarten classes. Particularly in the first term these programs should be based on play with opportunities for children to choose from a wide variety of suitable activities. For most children entering kindergarten, it is considered inappropriate to begin formal instruction. An informal program based on play is most suitable for this age group.
>
> (NSW Department of Education, 1986)

A policy statement on appropriate practice was issued in the same year, and an in-service kit was developed. Other States, such as Queensland, have developed similar curriculum guidelines, incorporating the years 4 - 8 rather than the kindergarten year alone.

These policy guidelines are important, but they need to be accompanied by preferential employment of appropriately trained teachers.

The paper also examines the issue of what should constitute appropriate preparation for early childhood personnel. The proposal offered in the paper is offered as a starting point for what needs to be wide-ranging discussion. This paper proposes that early childhood courses should be largely separate from primary and secondary teacher education courses because the organising feature of early childhood courses--the child and the family--does not fit with the disciplines-centred orientation of other teacher education courses. The paper also proposes that early childhood preparation needs to be more specific than 0 - 8. All courses should offer a narrower specialisation. Some small institutions will object that this simply is not feasible. It may be that these institutions need to collaborate with larger ones, so that students could carry out their

specialisations off campus. Or, if this turns out not to be feasible, rationalisation of the provision of early childhood teacher education may need to be considered. Most importantly, the issues surrounding decisions about teacher education need to be thoroughly debated.

The loss of specific promotions positions in schools, advisory and administrative positions in school systems and decision-making positions within universities for staff with early childhood expertise makes improvement in the status quo difficult. There is at present little 'voice' or strong advocacy for early education in schools. Given the range and importance of areas in which change is under way or being contemplated, it will be particularly important for the early childhood field as a whole to find its voice and to advocate jointly for good practice in early childhood programs for all children 0 - 8.

Australia has expertise in early childhood education and a developing children's services field that is among the best in the world. The knowledge that underpins the effectiveness of early childhood programs has been gained through the cumulative experience of many hundreds of early childhood educators working with young children and passing their knowledge on to students. New theories of child development and the teaching/learning process have modified practice, but the core of the field's focus on children has remained. It is crucial now that the essential elements of early childhood education are identified and articulated clearly, or they will be lost. Given the combined thrust of current conditions and forces within education, without this public and comprehensible defence of early childhood principles, the early childhood knowledge base is apt to be diluted and/or distorted by degrees and good practice eroded, with few outside the field noticing or understanding the loss.

National and State/Territory data needs to be collected on the number of early childhood teachers already working in schools, showing how many are working with children 5 - 8, and the number working in promotions positions.

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GLOSSARY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TERMS

ACT

preschool -	sessional programs for 4 year olds
kindergarten -	the first, noncompulsory year of school, for 5 years olds
Year 1 -	the second year of school
Year 2 -	the third year of school

NSW

preschool/ kindergarten -	sessional & extended hours programs for 4 year olds
kindergarten -	the first noncompulsory year of school, offered to children from 4 1/2, and lasting the full school day
Year 1 -	the second year of school
Year 2 -	the third year of school

NT

preschool -	sessional programs for 4 year olds
transition -	the first noncompulsory year of full-day schooling for 5 year olds
Year 1 -	the second year of school
Year 2 -	the third year of school

QLD

preschool/ kindergarten -	sessional programs for 4 year olds
Year 1 -	the first year of school, compulsory, for 5 year olds
Year 2 -	the second year of school, for 6 year olds
Year 3 -	the third year of school

SA

preschool/ kindergarten -	sessional programs for 4 year olds
reception -	the first noncompulsory year of school for 5 year olds. The term junior primary is used to describe the school years for 5 - 8 year olds.
Year 1 -	the second year of school, compulsory
Year 2 -	the third year of school, compulsory

TAS

kindergarten -	sessional programs for 4 year olds
prep -	the first noncompulsory year of school for 5 year olds, offered to half of 5 year olds
Year 1 -	the second year of school for half of children, the first year of school for half of children, compulsory
Year 2 -	the second/third year of school

VIC

preschool/ kindergarten -	sessional programs for 4 year olds
prep -	the first noncompulsory year of full-day school for children from 4 1/2
Year 1 -	the second year of school - compulsory
Year 2 -	the third year of school

WA

preschool/ preprimary -	sessional programs for 5 year olds
Year 1 -	the first year of school, compulsory
Year 2 -	the second year of school, compulsory

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SYSTEMS BY STATE

ACT

Children are currently offered 12 months of sessional preschool prior to starting school. Children with identified special needs may be enrolled from age 3. Preschool programs are administratively part of the ACT Education Department, though parent fees purchase equipment and pay for cleaning. Free-standing neighbourhood preschools are found in suburban parkland in the oldest suburbs and on school grounds adjacent to shops and the primary school in new parts of Canberra. Preschool provision is under review. Regional rather than neighbourhood preschools are among the options being considered, as are co-locations of preschools within primary school buildings. Many child care programs send children to government preschool and usually provide the transport required. Other child care programs employ teachers and provide preschool as part of the child care program. Some community-based preschools offer flexible, extended hours programs. These programs charge fees.

Primary schools offer one year of noncompulsory Kindergarten to children from the age of 5. Children enter in one intake at the beginning of the school year. They must turn 5 by 30 April. The system provides for 13 years of full-day schooling. Two early childhood schools, one of which offers a modified Montessori program, are run by the Education Department. Plans to build early childhood schools in the newest region of Canberra were considered and dropped. There are no longer any infants schools in Canberra and the system does not give any formal recognition to early childhood classes within primary schools. There are no restrictions on staffing within primary schools. Only early childhood trained teachers may teach in preschools.

NSW

Children are offered a diverse number of preschool choices in NSW. The largest number of preschool places are in community-based preschools where parents are often involved in the management of the services and where all parents pay fees.

Most operate for six hours a day and some offer extended hours. Most long day centres have trained early childhood teachers and offer an educational program. Over 300 commercial preschools now offer extended hours and parents receive fee relief.

Some primary schools have preschools attached to them. These are administered by the Department of School Education and parents pay minimum fees.

Primary education in NSW refers to 7 years of school: Kindergarten and Years 1 - 6. Children may enter Kindergarten at 4 1/2. Teachers are expected to be able to teach any level within K - 6. Assistant Principals and Deputy Principals are appointed on an Infants (K-2) or Primary (3-6) basis, but are expected to be involved in the

whole school. A few separate infant schools (K-2) remain.

There is currently no policy of full preschool provision for children in NSW. Some consideration is being given to transferring responsibility for all preschools to the Department of School Education.

NT

The provision of early childhood programs in the NT is very similar to that in the ACT. The Northern Territory Department of Education offers sessional preschool to 4 year olds. Some children in Aboriginal communities begin at 3. Most preschools are located on school grounds. Unlike the ACT, all preschools are administratively linked to their primary school. Parent contributions help with the purchase of equipment. After their fifth birthday, children may enter Transition classes, then progress to Years 1 and 2.

QLD

Children are currently offered 12 months of sessional preschool education within Education Department programs if they are four years of age by January 1 of that year. The non-government school sector also provides preschools for 4 year olds. Sessional Kindergarten programs provided by community associations are also available and are widely used by children 3 -5 years of age. Some community Kindergartens offer sessions that last 5 1/2 hours. State preschools have shorter sessions and are free. Many child care services use preschool programs to supplement their own. Collectively, over 90% of children participate in a year of preschool education prior to school entry.

The state school system admits children into Year One if they are five years of age by January 1 of that year. Schooling is compulsory in the year following a child's sixth birthday. Only a small proportion of children enter school after they have turned six. Children aged 5 - 8 years progress through Years 1, 2 and 3 of the school system. This results in an average exit age of 16-17 years at the end of the 12 years of full-day schooling.

SA

Children aged 4 are entitled to one year of sessional preschool before commencing school, with approximately 90% of eligible children attending a program. Most preschools are run by the government's Children's Services Office where they are referred to as Kindergartens. Another large component are Education Department Child Parent Centres. A small percentage are Affiliate Kindergartens, integrated programs or are run by the Catholic Education Office. In addition to sessional preschool, a range of preschool services is provided in Kindergartens in response to the needs of particular communities, including early entry for children with special

needs, home visiting, parent support programs and toy libraries. Preschool centres may also provide occasional care, before and after session care or full day sessions for children who need to travel on school buses in country areas.

The first non-compulsory year of primary school is called Reception. This is followed by compulsory Years 1 - 7. Reception classes are primarily for 5 year olds. However, a child who waits until 6 to commence school might still initially be placed in a Reception class. Although the national trend towards K - 7 primary schools is evident in SA, there are still some junior primary schools (R - 2) which attract the same leadership positions as 3 -7 and R -7 schools.

As in Victoria, preschool and child care both fall within the jursidiction of a single administrative office, known in SA as the Children's Services Office. In SA, the CSO shares the same Minister with schools.

TAS

Primary education in Tasmania includes sessional Kindergarten, full-day Preparatory Grade and Grades 1 - 6. The system provides 13 years of full-day schooling. Compulsory schooling begins in Year 1. Children normally enter Kindergarten if they have turned four by the first of January in the year of entry. Special needs children are also sometimes permitted to enrol at three. The entry policy, which currently results in some children missing the Preparatory grade (children who turn five in the first half of the year go straight from Kindergarten to Year 1), is under review.

All state funded Kindergartens are directly administered by the Education Department and the majority are linked with larger primary schools, usually on the same grounds. Attendance patterns vary according to local community need. In country areas children may attend for a couple of full days to accomodate transport via school buses. Often parent/child sessions and playgroups are run as well as sessional preschool programs.

Kindergarten to Grade 2 classes are referred to as 'early childhood education' classes. Historically there has been a division between lower and upper primary. Prior to the 1980's, infant schools were frequently in their own buildings. More recently a K - 6 focus has been encouraged. A few infant schools remain, but are under pressure to amalgamate with adjacent primary schools.

VIC

Children are offered one year of sessional Kindergarten/preschool prior to commencing school. Salary and on-costs and some of the operational costs are met by the Office of Preschool and Child Care. Local government is a major provider of services, as are churches and other community groups. The Office of Preschool and Child Care is trialling pilot preschool programs which will better meet the range of

needs of contemporary families.

The first non-compulsory year of primary school is called the Preparatory Year. As in NSW, children may be as young as 4 1/2 when they enter school. The Ministry of Education is currently reviewing school entry age, however. Prep is followed by Years 1 and 2. Altogether the system provides 13 years of full-day schooling.

Whereas there once were Infants Departments with their own buildings and Department Heads, primary schools are now all P - 6. There are no specific promotions or advisory positions set aside for teachers with expertise in junior primary teaching and teachers are required by the system to be able to teach in the full range P - 6.

WA

The educational arrangements for four- and five-year-old children in WA are complex and in transition. Community preschool programs are provided on a sessional basis for four- and five-year-olds (fives are placed first). Though not directly linked with schools, preschool staff salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education and preschools come under the official jurisdiction of district superintendents. Preschool teachers have recently been granted an administrative loading in recognition of their director status. The number of community preschools are declining as parents struggle to find the necessary resources to maintain premises. In many areas the State Education Department has begun to take full responsibility for preschools. Family centres (State funded multi- function centres designed to meet a range of family needs in new areas with few services) also offer sessional preschool programs for four-year-olds.

Government preprimary programs are sessional programs offered to five-year-olds, usually for four days per week. In older established areas some places are also available to four year olds, who are usually offered two half days per week. Like most preschools, most preprimary programs reserve Fridays for planning, though teachers may be asked to help in the linked primary school for half a day. Preprimary programs are mostly located on the primary school site or nearby. They are administered by the school principal and are staffed by an early childhood teacher and an untrained aide. There is a single entry at the beginning of the year. In the Catholic education system preprimary classes are full day, for five-year-olds only, although unused places are offered to four-year-olds.

In addition, a number of private schools offer full day placement for both four- & five-year-old children. Larger child care centres also offer preschool and preprimary programs for children four and five.

Year 1 is the first compulsory year of school. All children enter in January, and are either six or will turn six during the year. With rare exceptions, Year 1 is staffed by primary teachers. Recent changes have given early childhood teacher education

students the option to practice teach in Year 1 or Year 2 (Junior Primary) classes. These graduates have begun to seek employment in Junior Primary, and a few early childhood trained teachers are beginning to transfer to Junior Primary positions. As in Queensland, the public system provides twelve years of full-day schooling.

A few junior primary schools (K-2) are still found in Perth. Once called infant schools, junior schools have a long history in the state but are now under pressure to amalgamate with larger primary schools. In the 1980's a few early childhood units were created and still exist but there is no plan to create more. One early childhood advisor is remains in the central administration of the government school system. One person designated an early childhood advisor is attached to each District Office, but these positions are not necessarily allocated to early childhood specialists.

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